New Technology in the Human Services

Incorporating
Computer Applications in Social Work

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 4 WINTER 1989/90

Welfare Benefits Programs:

Ferret's Maximiser

ICL's Welfare Benefits Adviser

Lisson Grove's Welfare Benefits Advice Program

Spotlight on Ethics:

Ethical Practice, Records and Open Access

IT and Equal Opportunities

All HUSITA Publications Reviewed

Contents

New Technology in the Human Services

Published by:

CTI Centre for Human Services

Address for all enquiries and subscriptions:

New Technology in the Human Services,
Centre for Human Services,
Department of Social Work Studies,
The University,
Southampton, SO9 5NH.

Tel: 0703 595000 ext.3536 or 2629

Subscription Rates (Volume 5):

UK Personal £10.00 per volume (4 issues)

Libraries and Institutions £30.00

Europe £UK (Euro Cheques Please)
Personal £12
Libraries and Institutions £3(

USA and Australia US$:
Personal $20
Libraries and Institutions $6(

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

NEW SUBSCRIBERS ANI RENEWALS! If you have no subscribed for Volume 5 now is th time to act. A subscription form i enclosed with this issue of the journal Note that subscription rates **HAVI NOT BEEN INCREASED.**

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

The CTI Centre for Human Services i supported by IBM United Kingdor Trust and the Central Council fc Education and Training in Social Work

ISSN No.0959 0684

UP FRONT

This issue of *New Technology in the Human Services* has a strong educational flavour, though without losing its relevance to agency reality. Indeed, one of the features of IT in human services education is that there is no distinct body of specifically educational material: rather the educational sector looks to use applications developed for and running successfully in the agencies, albeit in a cut down or modified version to make them more suitable for a training context. Volume 4 Issue 4 offers in depth reviews of three welfare benefits programs, papers on important ethical concerns, and a look at a series of publications which might find a place on the essential reading list.

Welfare Benefits

When the question is asked - "What human services software would be most useful as an aid to training new staff?" - a few types of program routinely come near the top of the list. One, especially for social workers, volunteers and any others helping people on low income, is the computerised calculation of welfare benefits. There are several packages available in Britain, and we have looked at the three most widely used, Ferret's Maximiser (along with In-Work Helper and Helper Plus), ICL's Welfare Benefits Adviser, and the Lisson Grove Welfare Benefits Advice Program.

None of these programs was designed for training purposes, or has a training version. They are intended for human services workers who are dealing with real needs in the community. For that reason our review focuses initially on their effectiveness in the intended task. Only then do we consider their potential for students. Those on professional courses could be brought into contact with welfare benefits programs in two contexts, while acting as a trainee and receiving cases on a practice placement, and while formally learning about the social security system as part of the college curriculum.

From this training viewpoint, two pertinent questions can be asked of the programs. Do they make it possible for an uninitiated student, as well as a comparative expert to make a reliable benefits entitlement calculation in a wide range of different circumstances? Secondly, do the programs give enough information about the legal framework, definitions of terms, and processes of calculation to educate the student about the system as a whole? If the answer on both counts is *Yes*, then such programs are clearly valuable educational tools, especially in the context of situation centred learning.

IT, Ethics and Equal Opportunities

Welfare benefits programs are a particularly successful example of a computer application, highly valued for the tasks they will handle. At the same time there is growing recognition that these technological advances must be seen in a broader perspective. One such perspective is how computerisation fits in with traditional professional standards and values. Does IT, as some professionals argue, take the flexibility and human touch out of personal service? Another perspective sets IT in an ethical context. What are its built-in moral values, and how does it relate to the moral framework of individual, family and community living? Two papers tackle aspects of this theme. Paul Lee's contribution, based on his Edinburgh conference presentation, looks at developments in the 1980s in client access, data protection and case recording. As well as making a firm statement

about ethically acceptable practices, he offers students and others a clear guide to the complexities of personal data handling in social services departments.

The second paper looks at one of the themes at the core of equal opportunities philosophies - gender. It is the first of what, hopefully, will become a series of papers about IT and aspects of equal opportunities, taking up such topics as ethnicity, handicap, social class and the third world.

The HUSITA Papers

The 1987 HUSITA conference in Birmingham generated two books of edited papers and several other publications. David Phillips reviews all of them, and sees this collection, derived from one unique event, as a record of the state of the art in human services computing in the late 1980s.

ENITH

There is one news item to report. At the 1987 HUSITA conference there was much discussion about the possibilities and desirability of forming some kind of loose association or network of people involved in human services IT, on an international basis. At the time the likelihood appeared to be that a North American initiative would take off. To date this has not happened, but some quiet and persistent work in Europe, funded by the Government of the Netherlands, and mostly carried out by Hein de Graaf (whose CREON organisation was commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs), has started to yield results. Participants from 20 countries met under Dutch sponsorship in Maastricht in December 1989, and after two days of intensive debate formally launched ENITH, a European Network for Information Technology in the Human Services. An interim Executive Committee was formed, and given a year to make detailed proposals about ENITH's aims, structure, constitution, programme and resources. Details of ENITH's progress will be reported in this journal, and we will be happy to pass on any views from readers to the Executive Committee. Current documentation about ENITH can be obtained from Hein de Graaf. His address is:

Charlotte de Bourbonlaan 5,
2341 VC Oegstgeest
Holland.

The first formal opportunity to discuss ENITH's role will be at the Swedish conference on Computers in the Social Services, in Stockholm on May 16/17. Details on the conference can be obtained from Tapio Salonen,

School of Social Work,
Lund University,
Box 23, Lund S-22100,
Sweden.

Finally an apology. We promised for this issue an update of the 1987 PIP software list. In the event it has taken longer than anticipated to make contact with the various software companies, so we have had to hold it over.

Bryan Glastonbury

Why not write for New Technology in the Human Services? We welcome articles, short or long, comments, reviews and news items. At present we are especially interested in material which focuses on training, such as training staff in agencies to use computer systems, or using computer programs for human service teaching in colleges or training departments. If you have ideas or a possible contribution please contact Bryan Glastonbury.

WELFARE BENEFITS PACKAGES

Jackie Rafferty and Eric Smith and Bryan Glastonbury

Introduction

Any list of human services tasks in Britain which could or should be handled by computer is likely to have some recurring components - such as checking on legal requirements, tracking through complex but fixed procedures, and calculating entitlements to welfare benefits. This last task is conceptually simple: a potential claimant, or that person's professional helper, answers questions or gives information as requested by the computer, and receives in exchange a statement of eligibility for particular benefits, and the amounts due. A still more streamlined process sees the computer calculation leading directly to a benefits payment, subject only to checks on the correctness of the data provided by the claimant. In 1982 the DHSS made a move towards such a scheme, making available computers and a program in some social security local offices for claimants to use unaided. Joyce Epstein's (1984) review of 398 people who tried the system found that a majority preferred a computer calculation to one done by a DHSS officer or a human services professional. In the event the DHSS (DSS) appears to have switched policy away from giving claimants computer access, towards developing a major system for social security staff to use. Computer packages at the start of the 1990s exist as alternatives to the DSS calculation, enabling claimants, social workers and others to monitor and challenge the accuracy of DSS decisions.

The Centre for Human Services has review copies of three welfare benefits packages. They are the Lisson Grove Benefits Program, Welfare Benefits Adviser from ICL, and Ferret's Maximiser II. In addition the Centre has Ferret's hand held Psion Organiser II with the In-Work Helper and Helper Plus programs which are based on Maximiser. We have had an initial look at all the above packages, concentrating from a new user's viewpoint, on their ease of use, accuracy, on line help and applications. As the Centre's own reviewers have not given welfare benefits advise for some time, aid was sought from a practitioner, Eric Smith, a social worker with Hampshire County Council's Social Services Department. He uses the Lisson Grove program for his advice work, but he has made every effort not to bias his comments.

These are not the only programs available. The factsheet of the Community Information Project (March 1989) lists the Evesham Benefits Program, Westerman Welfare Rights Programs, Advisor B and Benefactor. All of them cover Income Support, Family Credit and Housing Benefit. The packages we have chosen for review offer a wider coverage, including, for example, attendance, invalid care and mobility allowances.

All welfare benefits programs are designed for use in the real world, and their usefulness must be judged by the accuracy, comprehensiveness, relevance and ease of operation in handling real instances of potential need. However, if these programs are to become widely used, then the users must be trained, and for this reason we are concerned to establish how far these computer packages can, on their own or with supporting material, be used in an educational and training context.

The main approach of the reviews is to be descriptive, to explain what each program does, and to illustrate typical screen displays and print outputs, though inevitably our comments focus also on gaps and inadequacies in the software. More than anything, however, our review has made clear just how much dedication and ingenuity all of the programmers have needed to show in these packages. Many countries, including the USA, have shied away from attempting to computerise welfare benefits entitlement calculations, because of their complexity and the frequency with which they change. The social security system in Britain is certainly neither simpler nor more static than elsewhere, and major recent changes, such as the introduction of the social fund, have

presented a massive challenge to programmers. Where we have gained an advantage is through having two small groups of developers, at Ferret and Lisson Grove, who have devoted many years to this specialised area of activity, and a large computer company, ICL, which has chosen to focus on software developments for the human services.

The Community Information Project's discussion of computerised welfare benefits cited four vital characteristics of any successful program - accuracy, maintenance (that is, updating), coverage, and the style or flow of the data collection. These remain at the core of our evaluation of each program, though we add one other major dimension, educational potential, and touch on a number of lesser features, such as screen appearance and speed of operation.

MAXIMISER II, IN-WORK HELPER AND HELPER PLUS

Maximiser II

Maximiser II was developed by Ferret Information Systems Ltd., the company formed by workers previously employed by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau to work on the old Welfare Rights Assessment Programme (WRAP). The contact address is Cheslyn Lodge, Cheslyn Hay, Walsall, WS6 7EG, and the phone number is 0922 414462. Maximiser II covers Income Support, Family Credit, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit and most non-contributory allowances, with an optional module for Unemployment Benefit, Sickness Benefit and Pensions. It currently handles the Community Charge for Scotland, and will do so for England and Wales as the need arises.

The program is designed for PC compatible and Apricot XI computers. A version is also available for ICL DRS 300, a microcomputer that is widely used in local authorities as a workstation, as well as for the Apple Macintosh and Unix machines. Overall this makes Maximiser the most flexible of the programs reviewed here, in terms of the range of hardware on which it will run. There is a choice of 3.5 or 5.25 disk versions. No information is given in the documentation about precise memory needs, but instructions are provided for installation on either twin floppy drives or hard disk. Printed output is offered, so the user who wants this option is warned to connect a printer, making sure that it is ready for use (on-line) and linked through normal default connections.

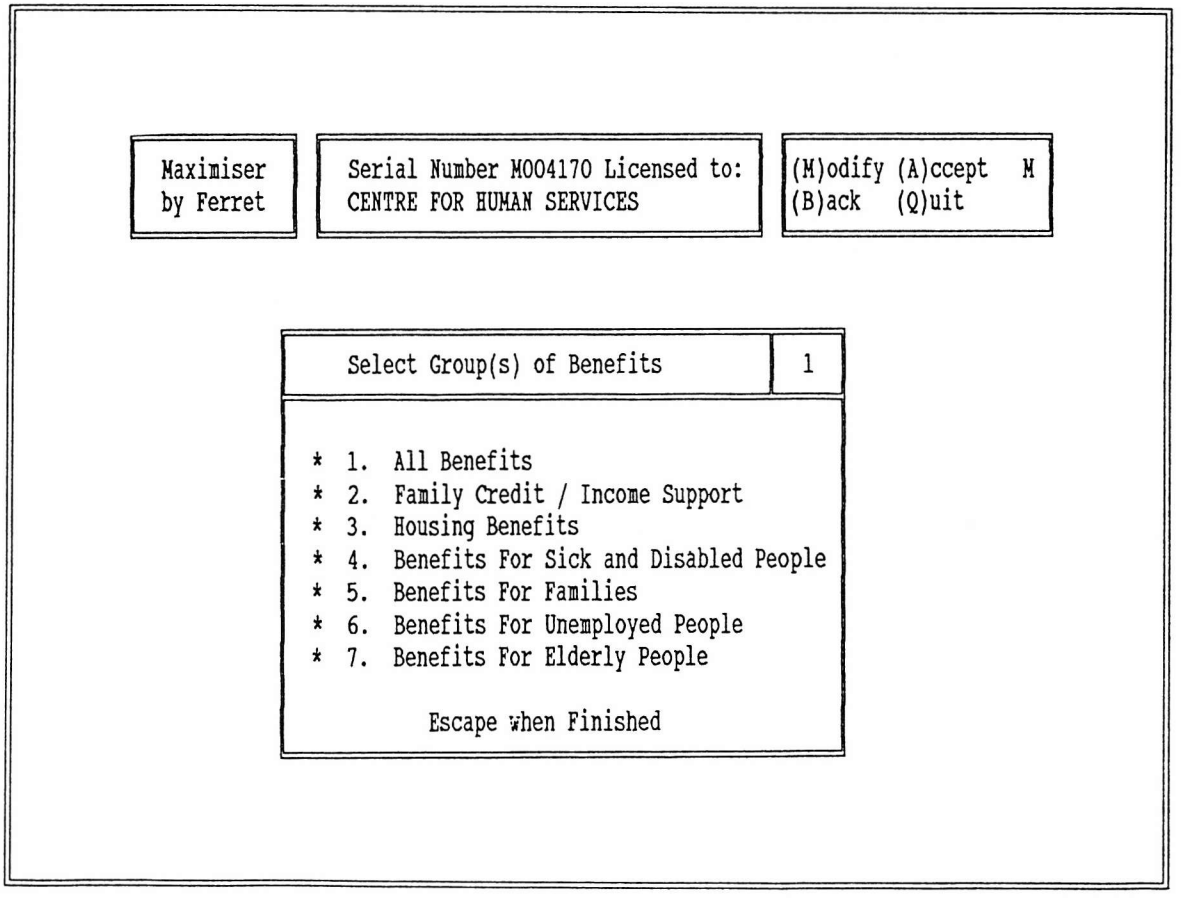
Support. Maximiser comes with a short manual, a "Quick Guide" on a single card, and information about training courses. The manual contains installation instructions, a guide to using the system (including some basic welfare benefits information), and a technical appendix. Both manual and quick guide are clearly written, and make it easy to use the program. Backup includes a wide range of training courses, directly bookable from Ferret, and a phone line for help and advice. Because Ferret is s small company, a telephone enquiry will often go through directly to those who write and update the program, so giving access to genuine expertise.

Price. Ferret operates an updating service whereby, for an annual charge, new software is automatically provided when there is any change in the benefits system. The price structure for the package is complex, and likely purchasers are advised to contact Ferret with details of their precise requirements. Broadly there is a standard price list and a lower one for voluntary organisations. Standard price for a single copy is £630 plus VAT, made up of £100 licence fee and £530 maintenance. The former is a one off payment, the latter an annual updating charge. The licence fee remains at £100 regardless of the number of copies purchased, but the maintenance charge is in a per copy basis, albeit at a sharply reducing annual rate. The cost of 100 copies is £10,100 (£100 licence and £100 per copy maintenance). The price of a single copy for a voluntary organisation is £365 (£100 plus £265), with the annual maintenance charge dropping to £75 per

copy for 100 copies. There is no separate pricing for educational users, but it is worth talking to Ferret on the basis of the voluntary agency rate. There are demonstration versions of the program available direct from Ferret either free or for a nominal charge.

In Action. Ferret describe Maximiser II as "The Powerful One", and view it as their all singing all dancing program. Once installed all necessary instructions are on screen to move you through the program, though the methods used took some getting used to. Maximiser uses (M)odify, (A)ccept, (B)ack and (Q)uit as well as enter and escape keys. The type of operation throughout is that a screen of questions is presented with possible (default) answers. If the offered answers are all correct then pressing *A* moves on to the next screen. If some or all of the default answers need changing then *M* is chosen, and the cursor moves down to the first answer point. The required answer is entered, the return key pressed, and the cursor moves down to the next question. Once all the desired answers have been entered, *Esc* moves to the next screen. As the labels suggest, *B* takes the user back a screen, so that errors can be corrected, and *Q* exits from the program after a warning that all data will be lost. Someone unfamiliar with a Qwerty keyboard would take time to become accustomed to these conventions, and there is a lot of darting across the keyboard. In particular it is not always easy to remember to press the return key after putting in an answer, before using *Esc* to move to the next screen.

Once past the opening screen a menu of benefits is presented, you make your choice and off you go. The opening screen tells you that *F1* is the key to enter the Help Screen, though it does not remind you of this as you move through the program. Nor does it point you to Help when the question you are answering has a specific meaning in benefit law and therefore needs the correct definition. There are two sorts of Help presentation. If it is called up when the cursor is in what the manual calls the Screen



Header (the top right of the screen), then "The Grand Tour" is offered. This is a menu covering general aspects of the operation of Maximiser. If help is called when the cursor is in the body of the screen, then specific material is provided on the subject material adjacent to the cursor.

The aim of Help is to give precise details about regulations, and, when appropriate, make reference to case law. The Help screens are substantial and relevant, but did not always give enough detailed information to help you if you have no background in welfare rights. For example the Trade Dispute help screen left out some essential information and it gave too simple a definition in what is a very complicated area. These gaps are fully acknowledged in the manual, where people in trade disputes, students, liable relatives and people from abroad are listed as not being fully covered in the help material. Nevertheless, where this is the case, the screen might usefully draw the user's attention to it, and refer you to an adviser or reference material for further information. The Mobility Allowance help screen, on the other hand is good; it gives you the regulations and their interpretation. In some instances the help screen is gender specific, and refers to men only when it should refer to men and women.

The system does check information as it is fed in, and will point out an error and seek correction, if an obviously false entry has been made. This covers simple errors, like entering something other than *f* or *m* for sex, but will also pick up where one entry clearly contradicts another.

Some Niggles. The program did not establish at an early stage that either member of a couple can elect to be the claimant, and who of a couple is the best person to make a claim; this can be very important, particularly for Income Support Disability Premium. There are four ways to claim, three of which are available to the claimant and their partner and the fourth to the claimant only.

The screen which asks what" Other Income" a claimant has is too vague. It was only when we went into the Help screen that we realised that we should not have put the Mobility and Attendance Allowance amounts in "Other Income".

The question is asked "Do you pay out maintenance?", but not "Do you receive maintenance?", an important area for single parents who constitute a large group of claimants.

Output. We ran three case studies through Maximiser (the same as with each of the programs), and although this hardly constitutes a definitive analysis, to the best of our knowledge the outcomes stated were accurate and informative.

Calculations can be viewed on the screen or printed out. Maximiser does not make comments about the prospect of benefits as the program runs through (as ICL and Lisson Grove do), but saves all its findings to the end, and presents them in a sequence which is set out in the manual. The printed reports cover benefit assessments only: that is, they do not include a print of the entries made by the user. An option to have a print of entries might be useful in instances where the user wants to make a later check on the validity of some answers. Reviewing entries is possible straight away, whether just to look at the calculations or go through the questions again. With Maximiser, as with the other programs, it is assumed that the process is a confidential and self-contained exercise, so no procedure exists for creating and saving a file of the case. Once the *Q* option is taken, a warning comes up that all data will be lost, and if this is accepted then the case details are wiped out.

Comment. Eric Smith's verdict was that overall Maximiser was laboured but sensible. Its target user group is Welfare Rights Advisers, and although it is usable directly by claimants, it makes few concessions to them. Its language, for example, is rather formal and inclined to brevity, in contrast to the involved and chatty approach of the ICL program. We shall consider the potential of Maximiser and the other programs as educational tools later on.

The Centre reviewers certainly agreed on the good sense and accuracy of Maximiser, and one

of them sought to probe why it should be perceived as laboured, and whether harder evidence backed up this description. Visually the monochrome display is well designed, with a crisp uncluttered layout. Having default entries may be a mild irritant for some users, but undoubtedly speeds up the process. There is one aspect of using Maximiser which almost all users are likely to find cumbersome, and that is the fiddle of having to use both the return and escape keys to confirm and entry and pass to the next screen. Users who are familiar with the standard typewriter keyboard will prefer pressing the first letters of commands to (A)ccept, (M)odify, and so on, but those who run computer programs dependent on function keys (F1, F2, etc.) for commands may be confused.

Is there any more to the suggestion that Maximiser is laboured (or the view coming later that ICL's program is slow)? A case study was put through each of the programs (employing a 386 micro computer) and measured for the time it took and the number of question and comment screens that the user had to go through up to the point of getting a printed assessment. The case was that of Clare, a single parent with two young children (one just of school age). All three are disabled with cerebral palsy. They are council tenants, and live on a mixture of benefits, including child benefit, and mobility, attendance and invalid care allowances. The designated task was to calculate income support entitlement and housing benefit.

It took the reviewer 12 minutes with Maximiser to get a three page print of the benefits due. The process passed through 37 screens of questions and information, and there was little discernable delay in moving from one screen to the next.

In-Work Helper and Helper Plus

In-Work Helper and Helper-Plus are supplied as a data pack on a Psion Organiser II hand held computer. The Psion Organiser comes with its own Operating Manual and it is capable of running a diary, information storage, address book, alarm and calculator as well as having a built in programming language called OPL (Organiser Programming Language). Besides In-Work Helper and Helper-Plus data packs it is possible to obtain others such as a Spelling Checker, Finance Pack and Maths Pack. Make way Filofax!

To use the Ferret data packs the user needs to be familiar with the first 8 pages of the Psion Organiser Manual, and then will need to refer to the individual booklets which relate to Helper-Plus and In-Work Helper. It would have been useful to have repeated the fist eight pages of the manual in the booklets, to avoid having to refer to more than one source of information. Nevertheless, the documentation is clear, and can be followed by someone with little experience of computers or calculators.

One difference from a normal computer is that the Organiser has a keyboard which is in alphabetical sequence. This is not a problem in itself, but quite disconcerting when swopping between a Qwerty keyboard and the Organiser.

Both programs are separately available for use on a PC or compatibles (Helper-Plus also for the Macintosh), coming with a manual and quick guide in much the same format as for Maximiser.

Prices. There is a single price list, covering a package of program with Organiser, programs on their own but for use on an Organiser, PC (or Mac) software, and annual updates. Top of the range is a package including the Organiser II XP, Psion Printer II (like the Organiser, battery powered and portable), a communications link so that the Organiser can be connected to a desktop computer or printer, and the relevant programs. For both In-Work and Helper-Plus in this configuration the cost is around £550, with annual update charges of £136 (£63 for Helper-Plus, £73 for In_work). Take off nearly £250 if you do not want the printer or the communications link.

Separately Helper-Plus with Organiser II CM costs £161, or with Organiser II XP (necessary for printer or comms) £185. The program pack by itself is £94. In_work Helper with Organiser II XP is £215, and on its own £124. The PC versions are £89 and £119 respectively, with

annual update rates at £59 and £69.

All prices must have VAT added. Users wanting training are invited to arrange this with Ferret. The help line is available (number as given earlier for Maximiser).

In Action. In-Work Helper is designed for the calculation of in work benefits and comparison with an enquirers out of work benefits entitlement. It covers the very specific area of concern about whether a particular household would be better off living on benefits, or with income from employment, and how much would have to be earned to make it worth while taking the employment option. Income Support, Family Credit and Housing Benefit calculations are carried out together with an assessment of Job Start Allowance eligibility and the income tax and national insurance liability of the enquirer. The program is already in wide use in the Department of Employment, so other users have the advantage of knowing that there is likely to be congruence between their calculations and those of the civil service. Overall this is an excellent tool for simplifying the time consuming chore of assessing the "Would I be better off if....?" type questions with which Citizen Advice Bureaux are only too familiar.

Helper-Plus is a pocket calculator for Income Support, Family Credit and Housing Benefit. It is a comprehensive system with few exclusions (these are listed in the documentation), and is seen as particularly useful as an aid to clients who have to be visited, rather than those who can come to the office to use Maximiser on a desk top computer. Obvious examples are hospital patients and elderly or handicapped people, whether living in the community or in the residential sector.

From the perspective of the Advice giver, the Organiser, In-Work Helper and Helper Plus are a boon. Advice can be given anywhere and the Organiser is much less intrusive than a desk top PC. Calculations are accurate, and the range of coverage extensive.On the down side, there are no help screens or help facilities other than the manual, and some of the abbreviations (to fit into the screen of 16 characters and 2 lines) is reminiscent of estate agents' house descriptions. As a tool for learning, the lack of help screens really limits its potential on an academic course in college, but it could become an essential piece of equipment to carry on practice placements.

ICL's - WELFARE BENEFITS ADVISER (WBA)

This is a new package and at present the Centre has a draft 16 page manual. We have no detailed information about support or general sources of information, but assume these to be within the usual ICL structure, which we have found helpful, friendly and easily approachable. ICL tends to deal with large customers, such as local authorities, and in this context fosters ongoing links through advisers and demonstrations, as well as marketing activities. WBA is an interesting development, in that it opens up the potential for a different market, noticeably in education and voluntary services, and presents ICL with a challenge to nurture these newer and, in their experience, smaller customers. Our contact person has been Fraser McCluskey, ICL (UK) Ltd., Scottish Life House, 11/17 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE2 1DB, 'phone 091 281 6111. He is well informed about WBA and ICL's other social services applications, and has acted for us as a gateway to technical support.

The program is billed to be "a simple to use computer system to enable people who have no specialised training in welfare benefits to be able to give advice to the public on their entitlement to welfare benefits". The system covers Family Credit, Income Support, Mobility and Attendance Allowances, Housing Benefit, One Parent Child Benefit and Invalid Care Allowance. It is available on both standard disk formats, and being designed for ICL's own DRS series of micro computers (intelligent workstations is their preferred description), will operate on PC or compatible machines. At present WBA is sold within ICL's concept of

a 'total solution' - that is in a package with a DRS machine. To confirm its wider compatibility the Centre reviewed the program on two PC compatibles, and XT and a 386 machine. It ran smoothly, once we had accommodated to the fact that it needs a lot of memory (about 570k as far as we could make out), and uniquely it is in colour, for those with the appropriate screen. Output is offered either to screen or to a standard printer.

Support. The ICL contact for support has already been mentioned. Documentation consisted of a manual and a separate set of installation notes (not likely to be needed for purchasers of the total solution).

You do need to read through the manual first. We went straight into the program and didn't realise until the second case study that besides the F1 Help facility there was also F2 function which gives information on why a question is being asked, and an F3 which explains the question in more detail including any words or phrases which are capable of different interpretations. It would have been helpful if pointers to these functions had been on screen. When you are in the Help, and Why functions there is no on screen guidance as to how to get out of it. The Escape key is the answer, but we had to hunt around. The F4 key is also vital, as a means of moving back to correct an earlier screen, though in the manual F4 is described as 'not used'. As stated above, we had what we took to be a draft version of the manual, and no doubt these details will be corrected in the final version.

Generally we found the manual to be clear and well laid out, with good step by step guidance to how to use the system, with accompanying diagrams of how the screen will look at each stage. It sets out and succeeds in its purpose of being acceptable and helpful both to users who have welfare benefits knowledge and those who are starters.

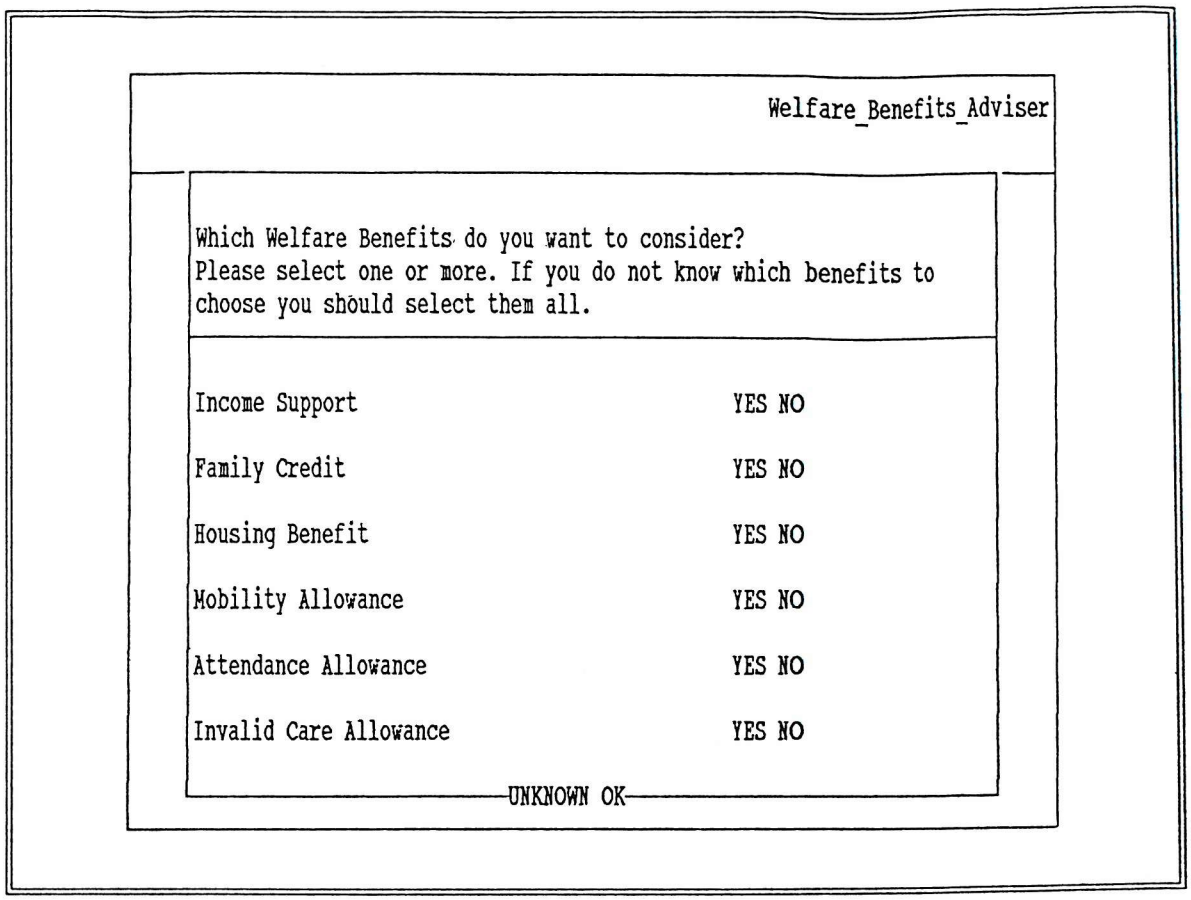
ICL expects to be responsible for installing the system, and does this in the context of a one day training course. The assumption is that this initial preparation will amount to 'training the trainers', who will then handle ongoing internal agency training, but in due course, especially as changed versions of WBA appear, ICL will address longer term training needs. There are plans to form a user group "in the near future".

Price. Within the concept of the 'total solution' WBA is sold with ICL's DRS range of computers. As with Maximiser there is a sliding scale of cost, according to the number of copies produced. For over 20 copies the price is £500 per copy: below 20 it is higher. The updating service is £250 a year per copy. It remains to be seen whether ICL will sell WBA separately on this basis, but for the present the preferred total solution is a package of DRS computer, printer, software, installation and maintenance for one year. The unit price for 20 or more packs is quoted as just over £2,000, based on a DRS40 computer (broadly comparable to the IBM PS2 Model 30, but with VGA colour graphics and monitor).

In Action. We liked the opening screen. It's well laid out and colourful. You do need a colour monitor to get the full impact of the bright greens and oranges, though the calculations are still accurate in monochrome! This screen emphasises that it is an Advisory program, and it also gives you the date of the program so you know whether it is current. Updates will be sent automatically.

First appraisal was very favourable: the keyboard use is simpler than Maximiser, using the enter and cursor keys only. There is only one method for answering questions, where Maximiser uses two or three depending upon the screen. The language favours plain English, except where regulations are being quoted. The system talks to the claimant not the adviser, but if it really is meant to be used directly by claimants then there needs to be more on screen guidance, for instance on how to select which benefit. You have to move the cursor down the list and enter "Yes" or "No" on each benefit. The accompanying manual contains a Summary of Use which is intended to be removed and left near the computer to remind users of the main functions.

There is a good explanation on Non-dependants, a difficult area covered well. We also liked the questions on Capital. The other programs needed specific figures: WBA asks for which



band you fall into, ie. under £3000, £3000 - £6000, etc. The 'Other Income' question was well laid out, with specific types of income listed. Attendance and Mobility Allowance screens were well laid out with good back up explanations and definitions.

The program gives you interim summaries of its calculations and when it tells you that you have no entitlement it does so very sensitively. For example on Family Credit it will tell you: "We are sorry to say that we think it most unlikely that you would qualify for Family Credit. This is because your assessable income (that part of you and your partner's income that is taken into account) is much greater than the applicable amount (the amount the government says you need to live on)". The other programs tend to just say NO.

Some Niggles: A question that gave us concern was the one early on to establish if you have a partner. The question presented is "Are you married? (Or living with someone)". These, for single parents who are not divorced, are not mutually exclusive statements. However, the only permissible answers are 'Yes' or 'No'. If 'No' is selected the program appears to presume the claimant is single, though use of the Help screens clarifies the position. This ambiguous question is off-putting at such an early stage in the program.

The Housing Benefit screens did not ask enough questions on what is included in your rent. It assumes no heating charges for council tenants which is not necessarily the case.

Output. On our test with three case studies the program was accurate and effective. Calculations are clearly presented on screen, and the use of interim summaries is reassuring. As with all of the programs, no record can be kept in the computer or on disk, though the manual does recommend that the system is registered under the Data Protection Act. This is a suggestion relevant to all of the programs.

The print out is excellent, reiterates that the information is advisory, and lists relevant addresses for claims of, for example child benefit or mobility allowance. The print does

list the figures which have been used in calculations, though it does not print the initial questions and responses.

Comment. Eric Smith's verdict was that he enjoyed using the program, and it was excellent on mobility and attendance allowances but less thorough on housing. It is user friendly, but in some areas does not give enough information to be helpful as a direct access program for clients, in which case the niceties and personal approach can become rather superfluous for the adviser. The format of the individual screens and the simple method of entering and answering are this programs major plus points.

WBA gives the impression that it is slow. Even on the 386 machine there were pauses before moving from one screen to the next, and on occasions there was what seemed to be an irrelevant blank screen. In fact the impression of slowness was false. On the timed test with the case of Clare and her two children, WBA passed through 31 screens (the fewest of the programs tested) and took 8 minutes (the quickest of the tests). Appearances can obviously be very deceptive, but ICL might consider ways of avoiding the initial impression, given that most users will not go to the trouble of a timed test. When Maximiser has the computer whirring away on calculations the viewer is told that it is "Ferreting".

LISSON GROVE WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE PROGRAM

This is the updated version of a program originally developed by Professor Brian Jarman in the early 1980's. A GP at Lisson Grove Health Centre, he started work on it after finding that some of his patients, in particular the chronically sick, were not receiving the benefits they were entitled to, and that their poverty was a contributory factor to their ills.

The programme currently attracts funding from a range of charitable trust and other sources, and, unlike the other two programs, is free. The Lisson Grove Welfare Benefits Advice Program (LG) covers Income Support, Family Credit, Housing Benefit, Maternity Benefit and virtually all non-contributory benefits, with guidance on many contributory ones. The Community Charge for Scotland is covered, with England and Wales included in next year's version. The manual lists four contact names, Tim Blackwell, Steve Bruster, Brian Jarman and Jen Henwood, all in the Department of General Practice, St.Mary's Hospital Medical School, Lisson Grove Health Centre, Gateworth Street, London, NW8 8EG, 'phone 01 724 2391 extension 208.

LG comes in both standard disk sizes for PCs and compatibles, running in monochrome only. It runs without difficulty within the normal 640k memory of a PC compatible machine. As with the other programs it offers output both to screen and to a standard printer

Support. LG comes with a User Manual, but once installed the running instructions are on screen. The 23 page manual contains installation information, though no other technical data. Its main aim is to guide users through the system, first by running through a simple case, then by describing the help screens and looking at more advanced features. It has a useful appendix on appeals and reviews.

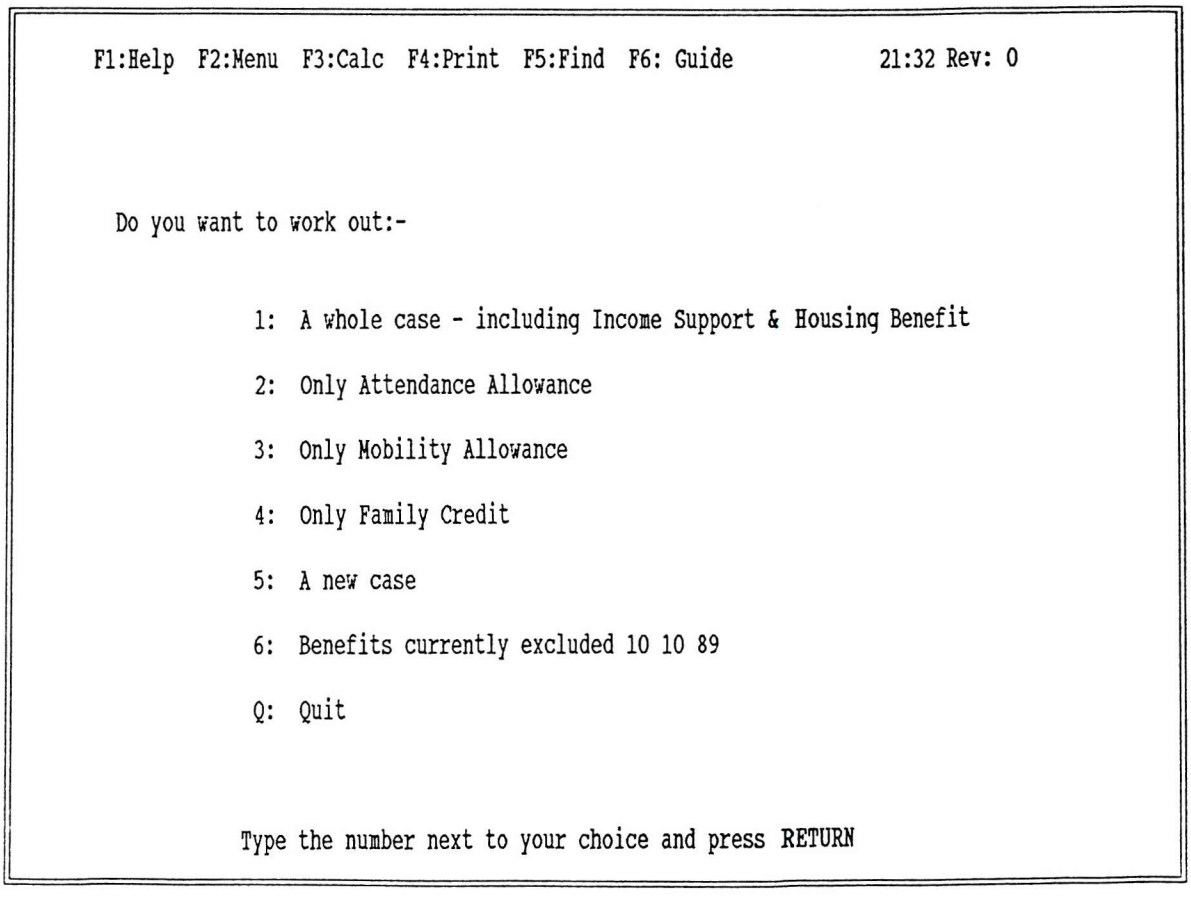
The manual is clear in what it sets out to do, but is less well set out than the ICL manual, and less precise in some areas than Maximiser's (Ferret, for example, are very precise in their manual about situations which are not covered by their system).

The manual does not advertise a support line, but gives a phone number and requests anyone finding an error in the program to get in touch. No training is advertised, so it must be assumed that users must organise their own. Agencies that use LG, like Hampshire Social Services Department, have not found it difficult to design training. Hampshire suggest that a 3 hour course is an adequate introduction.

Price. LG is free, and while copying is not prohibited, the manual does ask people to get copies direct from Lisson Grove. "In this way we can keep track of all users and issue updates to all users when necessary". Updates are also free.

In Action. Like the other programs LG starts with a menu screen. The top line of the screen tells you which facilities are available, and these are more extensive than on either of the other programs. In this case, F1 - Help, F2 - Help Menu, F3 - Calculator, F4 - Print, F5 - Find, F6 - Lock and F7 - Guide, as well as the time and the Revision number (the number of times that you have gone back and changed answers to previous questions). Several of the function keys are novel. F3 seeks to emulate a standard calculator. F4 allows the user to print a summary of the case so far, rather than confining the print option to the completed assessment. F5 strengthens the user's ability to be flexible by offering a switch to others screens, via a key word search. F6 allows the user to choose all forms of calculation and output, or to lock onto just one. The bottom line of the screen gives you help on what to do next. The information on the top and bottom lines is always present during the running of the program. These functions are the major advantage of this program compared with the others, once you have used the program a few times. So long as you consult the top and bottom lines on the screen it is virtually impossible to use the program incorrectly, unless error is made in data entry.

Lisson Grove will not win the design presentation award: ICL has to get that. LG runs in monochrome and tends to look untidy. The Help screens are extensive and you can move back and forth within the program with ease. LG marks whether a help screen is available with an "*" which is useful.



The program reflects its Health Centre origins by asking specific questions the other two programs do not cover; for example, its asks whether you have claimed Vaccine Damage payments, and will advise on whether you should be claiming free prescriptions and disability aids.

This is definitely a program to be used by the adviser, the language it uses is not personal to the claimant and it is not as user friendly as ICL's WBA. On the other hand it is more extensive than the other two in what it covers

Some Niggles. When we entered the wrong amount for child benefit, the program picked it up and told us what the amount should be, but accepted our wrong input when we did not correct it. Both ICL and Ferret programs worked on the correct figure for the calculation, regardless of the amount put in.

Within the housing benefits section, there was some ambiguity in the wording about whether Heating and Water charges were being taken as part of the rent or extra to the rent.

At times, the program is unclear in its use of certain definitional terms that carry specialised meanings in Department of Social Security (DSS) language. In particular, the term "Disabled" is used in a broad self-defining sense, early in the program, later it is used within the DSS meaning of being eligible for a disability benefit. This is partially explained on the Help screens. The question of the different use of technical language is very important. Certain phrases carry different meanings in DSS-speak to their everyday or dictionary meaning. Obvious examples are: "Non-dependent", "Joint-tenant", "Capital". All the programs we have reviewed have a difficult line to draw between providing the correct information for the adviser to understand and answering the question accurately, whilst remaining concise and clear. However, many of these technical areas defy easy explanation. The Lisson Grove program tackles this problem as thoroughly as possible, via extensive help screens and plain questions, though it too falls into confusion at times. Given that this area can produce problems for even experienced advisors it is necessary to temper criticism.

Output. As with Maximiser and WBA we obtained an accurate calculation on our three test cases. Some results are given on interim screens, and as mentioned earlier, it is possible at any time to print out material as far as the user has gone.

The print of the complete calculation is substantial. The user has a choice of wether or not to print the answers to all the questions, but a full print includes the assessment, the figures used for it, and a list of all questions asked and responses given. This last feature is not available on Maximiser or WBA and is very useful if the user wants to make a later check on the accuracy of entries or wants to show the DSS the basis of a claim.

Comment. The strength of LG is its flexibility and the additional features, and, of course, the fact that it is free. Its weaknesses are scruffiness, level of support and a somewhat cumbersome operation.

The scruffiness lies in the visual displays, where there is none of the smoothness of Maximiser or WBA, nor so much attention to general presentation. The level of support is hardly a justifiable criticism, given the 'no cost' tag, but users need to be aware of possible problems of backup and training.

Once again there is some disparity between appearance and reality in operation. LG feels quite fast, because screen transfers are almost instantaneous. This is obtained, however, by only having one question on a screen, so the user changes screens frequently, and retains little sense of the logical flow of questions. Both Maximiser and WBA offer a sequence of questions on screen in most instances. Further, LG does not have default responses to questions, either for facts (like level of savings) or for yes/no answers. WBA in particular saves the user a lot of time by an intelligent use of defaults. In the test with Clare LG moved through 81 screens (much the highest number), and took 14 minutes (marginally the slowest).

Some General Points

Exclusions. The programs list, within their manuals, those people who would be excluded from their program. Some of the most notable exclusions are:

Prisoners - on remand or in custody

Cases where families have differing immigration status

Cases where children spend part of the time at home and part of the time elsewhere - for example, in local authority care

Persons in residential accommodation (Note that those in Hostels, board and lodging establishments, residential care homes or nursing homes are included).

Language. With the exception of the Welsh Programs that are on their way from Ferret we do not know of any welfare benefit calculation programs written in languages other than English. This does not, of course, wholly preclude assessments for members of ethnic minorities who do not have a good (good to the point of some awareness of DSS jargon) English, but they would have to depend on an adviser to do the job for them, rather than having the opportunity themselves. Is it too much to hope for some multi-lingual versions?

WELFARE BENEFITS PACKAGES AS TEACHING TOOLS

The Social Work Studies Department of Southampton University are trialing Maximiser with a group of students, and the results of this will be written up in a later issue of this journal. The outline of that trial is that some social work (CQSW) students are receiving traditional classroom teaching on welfare benefits, while another group has been handed a copy of Maximiser and some case studies to work on.

The Centre for Human Services' initial conclusion is that all the packages looked at are useful tools for practising calculating welfare rights. They all take out the chore of doing the arithmetic (and get the sums right!), and they ensure that all benefits are covered and all relevant questions asked: but they cannot fully substitute for a thorough grounding in the benefit systems and relevant legislation and regulations. The courseware is yet to be developed for this aspect of the teaching, so the CPAG or other publications are still needed. When Ferret, for example, provide training courses for advisers, Maximiser is used by the tutor to demonstrate the results of case studies by way of an overhead projector linked to the computer, but the students themselves rely on written course notes.

The basis of the potential for using any of the programs in the classroom is the scope of the 'Help' material. Is it exclusively case specific, or does it offer general information of the sort that would normally be offered in a class? At present there is probably not enough general material to allow the programs to be used as the sole curriculum material, though clearly there are ways of planning teaching which make best use of the computerised opportunity. The monitored trial with Southampton's social work students uses case studies as the route to using Maximiser (Ferret is also developing training case studies), and this form of situation centred learning does serve to bring the computer program centrally into the learning process.

Going outside the classroom altogether offers still more opportunity. Social work and other professional human services students all have practice placements as part of their training. In these placements they work with clients, and certainly in social work it is common for them to face the task of helping with welfare benefits eligibility problems. Access to one of these desktop programs and/or to Ferret's portable versions would be invaluable. The students would then be in the position to feed their own case material into the classroom context.

Concluding Comments

It seems to have become the tradition at the end of reviews of computer equipment or software to make comparisons. Which program is the best? The three packages we have discussed here all have their major merits and minor weaknesses. Lisson Grove's offering is more than cheap and cheerful:

it is free, flexible, wide ranging and most effective, even if it lacks a totally professional appearance and is somewhat slower running. Maximiser shows the value of the depth of experience and commitment of its creators. It is perhaps a little formal in its tone, but it addresses itself most successfully to service workers, and in addition to its stand alone quality, it links to In-Work Helper and Helper Plus, the highly valued portable systems. ICL's program is fast, attractive, a pleasure to work with, and again does an excellent job. In reality they are all extremely good programs, doing well the tasks they set out to accomplish, and having considerable potential as educational tools. More than that: they are conspicuously successful examples of computer applications offering direct benefits to people in need. Using such systems is an essential part of the modern practice of personal social servicing, and one of them should be in every front line office and every educational or training unit.

Reference

Community Information Project, March 1989, *Computer Factsheet*. This is one of a series available from CIP, 2nd Floor, Universal House, 88 - 94 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA.

Eric Smith is a social worker with Hampshire Social Services Department. Jackie Rafferty and Bryan Glastonbury are from the CTI Centre of Human Services at Southampton University.

CLIENT ACCESS, DATE PROTECTION AND CASE RECORDING.

Paul Lee

Rarely, it seems, do Government and Social Work interests coincide on objectives. However, on the subject of client access to records there is a concurrence that clients should be able to see what is written about them by Social Services staff. Albeit this concurrence stems from slightly different perspectives in that the Government approach emphasises the accountability of public organisations, whilst the Social Work approach is much broader and although recognising and welcoming the accountability aspect, is also concerned to ensure participation and agreement with clients about what should actually be written in records.

The two main Acts - The Data Protection Act 1984 and The Access to Personal Files Act 1987, together with the Local Government (Access to Information Act) 1985, set the legislative structure for access to records. Previously however, the Circular LAC (83) 14, Disclosure of Information to Clients, and several reports by the British Association of Social Work (BASW) eg. *Clients are Fellow Citizens*, 1980, *Effective and Ethical Recording*, 1983 and *Improving Social Work Records and Practice*, 1986 contributed significantly to the environment into which the legislation was projected.

Indeed the DHSS Circular LAC (83) 14 stated "The Secretary of State shares the increasingly held view that people receiving personal social services should, subject to adequate safeguards, be able to discover what is said about them in social services records. It has always been good practice for social services staff to share non-confidential information with the users in the context of an open professional relationship, and this approach will and should continue; but in the past, case records have been regarded as private, internal documents and have been compiled on the basis that their contents would never be disclosed. The Secretary of State's view is that in future - with a number of necessary exceptions - those users who wish to have access to written records should be allowed to do so".

Taken with the work by BASW, some considerable developments in new technology, and a number of individual authorities who were concerned to improve and develop their recording practice, it emerged that there were enormous implications for social work practice, including the highlighting of users rights to share information, and by definition to challenge the service provided.

There is a clear link between ethical practice, recording and open access. The whole process is a partnership between users and workers in decision-making and recording these decisions and the work carried out. The notion of partnership allows the setting of joint objectives and the opportunity for all parties to evaluate progress. At the very least it

should offer the opportunity for differences of opinion and perception of fact to be recorded and to reduce, if not eradicate, one-sided recording which inevitably places the client at a disadvantage.

It will be useful at this point to consider some of the main provisions of the actual legislation, which gives the framework from which some authorities have begun to develop a wider and more far reaching policy on access and recording.

From 1st April 1986 the Local Government (Access to Information Act) 1985 began opening up certain lists and Committee minutes to public scrutiny - including access to Committee and Council meetings. People were therefore able to see and understand much more clearly what was being done by their elected Councillors. It became possible to strip away the mystique which surrounded some of the workings of Local Government. Prior to this Act had come the Data Protection Act of 1984 which recognised the need to safeguard the interests of individuals where information about them was held on computer. Partly this was the result of the enormous increase in the development of new technology and the fears that were aroused about the confidentiality of information held in such fashion. The important issue in the terms of access to records is that the Act conferred a right for people to access information held on them, albeit with some exceptions.

The enactment on 1st April 1989 of the Access to Personal Files Act, 1987 made similar provisions to the Act of 1984 in respect of manual records. In general terms this means that all personal information is accessible (no matter how or where kept) which relates to a living individual who can be identified by that information and which is held in any manual records. Broadly speaking the Act, through regulations issued by DSS in England and Wales, and SWSG in Scotland, confer right of access to information gathered on or after 1st April 1989. The Social Services authority is obliged to have a formal access procedure and to inform any individual about any personal information held, and to give access to such information, including a copy, where required. Requests for the information must be in writing and a fee is payable if wished by the Local Authority, which can reasonably require proof of identity, in order to establish the appropriateness of the application and to locate the information itself.

Complications arise if the information has been donated by another professional, in which case the authority is obliged to seek consent for the information to be disclosed. The authority must respond to the request for access within forty days of the receipt of the request, and if there is difficulty obtaining consent from third parties, sufficient information which is held must be given to the applicant, whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the donor. Apart from the above exemptions to disclosure, the giving of information can be refused if the social work function will be prejudiced by causing serious harm to the physical and mental health of the applicant if disclosure is made. Disclosure can also be withheld if the information is held for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime, or apprehension or prosecution of offenders. Adoption information, some educational information and confidential material as defined in legal proceedings can also be withheld.

It would be pointless if, whilst giving access to information, it were not possible to allow rectification and erasure of inaccurate information, and the Act allows this. Even were the Local Authority not to agree that the information is inaccurate, a written notice will need to be attached to the information alleged to be inaccurate and the applicant must be allowed to see any amendments and attached notes, and can also be given a copy.

A review procedure for the formal access to personal records legislation is built in, and the Local Authority must appoint a Panel of three Councillors to hear appeals against the refusal of access, should there be any, and only one of these Councillors can be from the Social Work/Services Committee. Individuals can make comment in writing and/or verbally to the review committee.

The above can only give a very sketchy idea of the complexity of the access legislation, and readers are advised to consult the relevant acts and guidance for definitive explanations and descriptions of appropriate procedures.

Perhaps at this point I can indicate some of the issues which arise for Local Authorities in implementing the legislation, bearing in mind the move within Social Work to become more open with clients, and to consider where sharing of information and recording might be beneficial.

Considering first the position relative to *computer information.* In general terms the nature of the technology indicates that the information should be simple, logical and consistent, in order to minimise variation and confusion. It should promote accuracy and precision, and whatever systems are used, it is

essential that they are reliable. There are obvious worries that people have about what information is kept on computers and, perhaps before establishing systems, questions have to be asked and answered about the use to which the information will be put. Access and retrieval must be easy and quick and information should not be held which cannot be disclosed to the subject. Information should also be jargon free and capable of interpretation whilst maintaining the confidentiality of subject and donor.

The issues in relation to *manual records*, whilst similar to some extent to computer records, differ in some major areas. Traditionally, manual records have varied from authority to authority in size, format, depth of recording, etc. The usual practice is for everything relating to the client, no matter whether it is opinion, fact, letters from professionals, agencies, etc. to go into the file, and often is held in chronological order. The main problem is that, other than letters, usually there is no client contribution and often no corroboration of information. If we accept that information should be accurate, accessible, amendable and succinct, and that opinions should be substantiated, then there are very real implications for such aspects as, structure, order of file, style of recording and method of recording. As I have said earlier, from 1st April 1989 the client has had a right to see his or her records and to amend them. A formal system of access must be established. Clearly there is a possibility of defensive recording and "safe selection of material" to record. A more effective system would be to encourage client participation in recording so that information is not only shared, but entries to records are jointly agreed or dissent is noted.

Within social work there has always been an emphasis on confidentiality in working patterns and in recording. Within the area of social work records, the new access legislation and partnership in recording practices does not diminish the need for confidentiality. In some respects it heightens the awareness that social workers must have of the importance of maintaining confidential information appropriately. The problems that arise for donors of information to Social Work/Services Departments, in terms of whether the information can be shared with clients, are also difficult for, as are those of having information from clients in terms of whether it can be shared with other agencies. BASW in *Social Work Principles of Practice; Code of Ethics*, 1988 stated, "They will recognise that information clearly entrusted for one purpose should not be used for another purpose without sanction. They will respect the privacy of clients and others with whom they come into contact and the confidential information gained in their relationships with them."

Within the context of Local Authority operations, it is clear that some Local Authority staff will need to know information who are not directly involved with the client, eg. Accounts and Finance staff, Legal Advisers, Senior Staff, but the principle of confidentiality still holds good. It might be interesting to consider that the *Draft Code of Practice* from the BMA, 1989, makes similar points to the above, as well as clearly making reference to social workers in Local Authorities being legitimate receivers of health information in certain circumstances. One of the areas of difficulty within the whole field of access to information is how we deal with information from and to other professionals, as well as other agencies. It is important that clear, unambiguous arrangements are made so that all agencies are aware of the policies of individual agencies on disclosure and the keeping of information. There will clearly be issues of trust. Will the Police, Education, or Health Services give Social Work/Services Departments information if it may be disclosed to a third party? What effect may this have on the ability of social workers to undertake appropriate diagnosis of problems and to plan appropriate treatment methods?

I would refer at this stage to the need to consider the *Code of Confidentiality* which has been issued in Scotland by SWSG (1989) which relates in particular to donor information, and emphasise that in order for the system to work there must be consultation and discussion with relevant agencies to set the ground rules and create a climate of understanding and genuine co-operativeness. This will allow appropriate work to be done within an atmosphere of trust where appropriate information is exchanged without compromising the spirit or the letter of the legislation.

Some dilemmas emerge with regard to direct dealings with clients, because although access to information on the client is quite straightforward in many respects, is it as straightforward if that client wishes to have information on his or her own family members? Decisions must be made about who is the client and what status is assigned to information on other significant actors in the network of that client.

There are problems also relating to access to information given at Case Conferences by third parties, and where information about one client is inevitably intermingled with that of others. Authorities will need to establish clear procedures

for dealing with these issues.

We might be forgiven in the light of the above for asking whether records are really necessary. Having heard that the client can now see them, have them copied, changed and deleted - is there any point in keeping anything but names and addresses and formal descriptions of services provided? This seems to strike at the heart of the reasons for keeping records within the social work context, and we would be bound to conclude that records are necessary; they are significant and they serve a number of purposes.

Firstly, records of client contact and interaction are generally the first and quite likely the only *proof* of contact and of the work done. Some client surveys have indicated that people are happier when they know what is going on and can share in the planning within the social work task. This can only realistically be done if there are records of the involvement, and clients tend to expect that a record of some description is kept so that reference can be made to it.

Secondly, records have a dynamic importance. They are essential for reflection, planning and measuring the outcomes of intervention. They are also essential for proper supervision, and finally, they chart agency involvement, responsibility, development of work, and often reflect a statutory responsibility.

The main elements of content in recording are two; firstly - fact, and secondly - substantiated opinion. It is essential that whatever is recorded is accurate, corroborated where possible and agreed between worker and client. Erroneous information or part-truth held on client files, often for many years, can lead to inappropriate responses to particular clients from new workers, and can lead to false conclusions drawn in the presentation of eg. Court Reports. In any event, there is the potential of serious injustice for some clients, if less than accurate information is recorded.

It can be seen that not only is accuracy and reliability necessary, but records must actually be produced; they are an essential and integrated part of the social work process. They must be of high quality, they must be salient, and the selectivity of material for inclusion is of paramount importance.

If we accept the above then we must decide when records are to be made, whether they are a priority, and how best they can be integrated within the workload so that recording becomes part of the total process. Obviously timely recorded information minimises inaccuracy. Factual, concise and purposeful entries are essential for the appropriate use of records. It is unlikely, for instance, that the records traditionally used, where everything is recorded, in a somewhat arbitrary fashion, would appear to be the most effective way to achieve consistency where planning and development is a necessary part of the process.

With the current legislation and available technology, together with the increasing acknowledgement of consumer opinion, it would seem to be an opportune time to move to a more open and participative system of recording. It is impossible to have an effective access to records approach without a clear policy on openness and participating with clients. Not only is this sharing access and information, but also jointly creating the record on a contractual working basis.

Over the past few years of the move towards consumerism and the establishment of the rights of users/customers, social work interests have debated the issues involved on reaching a position where clients are able to articulate their needs and assert their right to decide. In 1980 BASW produced a report *Clients are Fellow Citizens* urging that social workers share knowledge, information, decisions and records with clients. In 1982 the Barclay Report re-emphasised and developed the notion of client participation. In 1983 BASW's report *Effective and Ethical Recording* recommended a new approach to recording based on client access. As we have already seen, DHSS Circular LAC (83) 14, Disclosure of Information to Clients emphasised the Secretary of State's view that "with a number of necessary exceptions, those clients who wish to have access to written records should be allowed to do so".

Following all this, Grampian Regional Council is one Authority which has developed a fully integrated live access system to offer a partnership relationship with clients on the premise that: "Open and honest relationships between workers and users must rest on a partnership between them, in both the process of decision-making when social work is offered, and its recording". This changes the basis of social work intervention. It becomes based on the sharing of power and a contractual arrangement with jointly agreed and jointly defined objectives for the social work task. Although some information may be damaging and therefore not advisable to disclose, such restrictions should be kept to an absolute minimum.

In *An Introduction To Social Work Theory* (1987) David Howe says, "Contracts foster explicitness, clarity and openness in the relationship between worker and client. They also provide a built-in framework for establishing reciprocal accountability".

In order to establish open access and client participation in recording, there are several important principles which need to be adopted:-

1. Individuals should have access only to information about themselves.
2. User access should be easy.
3. A parent has access to files only as a representative of the child.
4. Clients/users should be informed and helped to exercise their rights to read and correct files.
5. Clients/users should be able to participate in the recording process.
6. Regular assessment and plans should be recorded with client/user involvement.
7. Clients/users should know as much as possible about the restricted information held on them.
8. All personal information is confidential.
9. Information supplied should not be used for alternative purposes.
10. Donated information is confidential although some exceptions must exist.
11. Other Departments/Agencies policies should not be breached.
12. Records should be observed or verified facts - opinions should be identified.
13. Records should be easy to file an retrieve.
14. Records should be kept up to date.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that it is not an easy task to establish the above approach to record keeping. It is one thing to state the principles of open access and participation, and another thing altogether to implement such a process. Clearly new technology allows some of the more mechanical aspects to be dealt with more effectively, eg. simplifying records, quick retrieval, and development of helpful tools such as instantaneous procedure manual print-outs. However, successful implementation depends on the changing of attitudes and effective planning of any new system - Open Access is no different in that respect.

What is needed in the first instance is the commitment of senior management to changing the process and creating a policy on record-keeping. Another important aspect of the process is to achieve policy agreements with other agencies relative to third party information.

Within Authorities there needs to be developed clear instructions on:-

a) Access principles and policy
b) Access procedures
c) Recording guidelines and standards
d) Code of Confidentiality for staff

In addition, there must be adequate preparation for all staff. The encouragement and fostering of commitment and understanding of direct supervisory personnel, team leaders and seniors, and there must be good support to basic grade staff in the establishment of the system.

Most of this is achieved by good, effective supervision arrangements and the establishment of effective training packages, plus - very importantly - administration support and training to provide the back up for the development of a new system.

Clearly each authority will develop its implementation plans in different ways, but running through all the development must be consultation with staff and the opportunity to test out the system and to familiarise staff with new procedures. A very important element of the whole process is the availability of resources to implement the new system properly. Costs are inevitable because usually, if nothing else, new files are needed, but there is also the cost of training, consultation, etc.

The benefits of an Open Access and Participative Recording Systems are numerous. Clearly there will be a more uniform system of recording, and an emphasis on power and decision-making sharing between clients, workers, and the agency, and if nothing else, recording procedure changes would be worth this. Other benefits, however, relate to a slimmer and more effective system of recording which enhances supervision and, I believe, a more effective staff development system. It also saves time, in that records are quicker to read and more focused on the important information which allows rapid and more effective diagnosis of problems, and description and planning of treatment.

All in all the legislative framework and the attitude change within social work combine to offer to clients a much more appropriate service, which is more focused and purposeful, and increases the opportunity for more successful outcomes in the social work task.

LEGISLATION AND INFLUENCES:-

1. DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984 : Enforced from November 1987. Client rights to access to computer data.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985: Enforced from April 1986.

3. ACCESS TO PERSONAL FILES ACT 1987: Enforced

from April 1989. Client rights to access to all personal information held by Social Work Authorities.

4. CIRCULAR LAC(83)14. DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION TO CLIENTS.

5. B.A.S.W. *Clients are Fellow Citizens*, 1980.
Effective and Ethical Recording, 1983.
Improving Social Work Records and Practice, 1986.

6. a) ACCESS TO PERSONAL FILES (SOCIAL WORK) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 1989
b) CIRC. SW2.89 S.W.S.G.

7. a) CODE ON CONFIDENTIALITY OF SOCIAL WORK RECORDS - S.W.S.G. JAN.1989
b) CIRC. SW1/89 S.W.S.G.

8. DRAFT CODE ON CONFIDENTIALITY OF PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION (REVISED 28.2.89) B.M.A.

Paul Lee is a Divisional Officer with Grampian Regional Council Social Work Department.

IT, Moral Values and Equal Opportunities

Jackie Rafferty and Bryan Glastonbury

Introduction

When the Centre for Human Services accepted a grant from the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) to help extend the dissemination of information about software in social work education, it also accepted an explicit responsibility to pay attention to the equal opportunities aspects of the activity. This reflects not so much a single topic, as two fairly distinct areas of concern. In a broadly ranging context we can ask about the position and role of IT *per se* in equal opportunities. More specifically we can focus on the equal opportunities record of IT in the human services, and in human service education.

The dominant themes in equal opportunities discussions are likely to include the third world, social class, race, disability and gender. In all there are certain broad generalisations to be made about their relationship to IT. In the context of international, community and personal interactions, IT represents power. In the world political arena IT is a strategic commodity, inextricably bound up with armaments, so the equal opportunities principles embedded in the concept of technology transfer are swamped by military and foreign policy dictates. Where there are no embargoes, pricing policies take over. Why is IT so much more expensive in some countries, especially the poorer ones?

The impact of costs, for hardware, software, networks or whatever, is a core feature of the place of IT in any society's socio/economic divisions, as are the practicalities of access, and the level of education needed to make use of computer opportunities. For non-English speakers, or those for whom English (more precisely, American English) is a second language, there is a further major impediment. English is the language of computing. Programming languages, in-so-far as they relate to any spoken tongue, are English-based. Programs are mostly written and run in English. Wealthier communities can and have made the necessary translations, but many do not have the resources or skills to do so. In a country like Britain, the Englishness of computing helps to institutionalise discrimination against ethnic minorities.

If IT has made a conscious and successful bid to combat an area of discrimination, it is in relation to disability. There have been sophisticated developments of alternative technologies for those unable to use a standard keyboard, and other valuable aids both in equipment and programming. In stark contrast the record of IT towards gender discrimination, most blatantly perhaps in its marketing, has been appalling. Symbolism abounds in computer advertising. Machines which are clearly being used as part of office automation, to replace typewriters, are almost always operated by attractive young women. However, where the computer is a tool of management, creative design, or technological innovation, the user is likely to be male. Women sit demurely at desk-top machines, happily and decoratively word processing: men point with authority at a screen of computer aided design, or double company profits at the swing of a portable PC and a smirk at the latest trade figures faxed in from Japan.

IT and Gender

Despite the long introduction, this article is not a general review or swipe at the poor record of information technologists in the field of equal opportunities. It is more specifically a look at the interaction of IT, education and gender, and how the issues to emerge impact on the human services. Within the higher education sector computerisation has been proceeding apace, but on human services courses there has been a low take up of IT potential, with higher priority on new technology going to those disciplines where computers are traditionally at home, like engineering and mathematics - subjects in which there is still a strong male bias. In disciplines where women are numerically dominant, how does gender influence this situation?

"Our culture continues to define computers as male machines, even though they represent an area of importance for both men and women... Informatics needs to shift its emphasis away from technology and equipment, which tend to scare women off, and focus instead on its outreach to people." said Dr. Elisabeth Gerver, Director of the Scottish Institute for Advanced and Continuing Education, at a lecture "The Gender of Informatics" at the University of Ulster in February 1989.

A piece in the Guardian (17.2.1989) had the headline *Skills crises in IT as computers go 'male'*. The item details how throughout the 1970's the number of women programmers and systems analysts was rising. In 1981, 22.5% of new computer science graduates were women. By 1986, the proportion of women graduates in computer science had dropped to 13.3%, and by 1988, the percentage was down to 10. Students of this shift believe that it was not a coincidence that in 1981 the Government announced its intention to ensure that every school had computers. Before computers became formally part of school life they were sexually neutral: once they reached the schools many head teachers passed them on to the maths departments, where there is a recognised imbalance in how boys and girls perform. It is interesting to note that the first subject areas to set IT, as one of the National Curriculum attainment targets in schools, will be maths and science, not history, geography, or the social sciences.

In an American study a correlation was found between computer confidence and maths performance (Munger and Loyd, 1989). Studies from the USA also indicate that "educators are noticing that when school computers are available for optional use, it's mostly boys who use them" (Sanders, 1987), and that there is a relationship between the willingness and ability to use the computer in school and the availability of a computer at home. A survey undertaken by the Women's Action Alliance found that 37% of the boys in the study had computers at home and 28% of the girls. But they also found that among the girls who had computers at home there was an overwhelming majority reporting that the computer was used only by fathers and brothers. Mothers and sisters were rarely reported as frequent home computer users (Sanders, 1987).

In the home, computers have replaced the train set. A QED. programme on BBC1 (16.1.1990), titled *My Best Friend's a Computer*, highlighted that £10m is spent in the UK every year on computerised toys and games. Parents are buying computers for their children as educational aids only to find that the last thing they are used for is school work. Shoot-em-up games seem to be the most popular, with titles such as 'Mercenary Comp', 'Terrorpods', 'Barbarian', 'Ult Warrior', designed to boost any young male's macho image. The adult male often prefers the Dungeons and Dragons type fantasy adventure, sometimes with some sexual spice added. A look through any computer magazine dealing in the leisure market, or High Street shop selling games software, will show a distinct minority of gender neutral games and even fewer that are designed for the female market.

Even where serious use is made of computers by adults of both sexes, the image is still strictly male. One University's Computer Literacy service has adopted as its slogan "Computers - the thinking man's Black and Decker". It is a very apt slogan, as it raises the profile of computer use from games to an intellectual hobby, and cleverly disassociates itself from the low status familiarity that women are perceived to have with computers, as keyboard operators and secretaries.

The Human Services Scene

A search of the literature available from the Equal Opportunities Commission and NALGO revealed little research on women and information technology. What is available tends to focus on women in the computer industry and in data processing. The search did not reveal any material on the impact on women human service professionals of the growing computerisation of their employing agencies.

The Centre for Human Services role is to promote the use of computer assisted learning in human

service courses at universities and higher education institutes. One task the Centre will take on, when reviewing software, is to check whether programs do reflect a sensitivity in their language and design for women, and for people who form the minority ethnic population. On a positive note there are, as already mentioned, a range of programs specifically designed for people with physical disabilities, and the Centre will be looking at these too, to review their usefulness as aids to student learning, as well as scrutinising them for gender and/or race bias. The larger task the Centre faces is of overcoming the hurdle of "the computer's male emphasis, which tends to scare women off" (Gerver, 1989), and focus instead on its ability to aid the process of working with people. This may go some way to counter the lack of opportunity that the majority of women students and women lecturers may have experienced in the past.

It is to be hoped that this inequality of opportunity will change in the near future, as human service agencies computerise and women come through the school system computer literate, with high expectations that courses will reflect, in their teaching practice, the increasing availability of relevant new technology applications. But unless a pro-active stance is taken to rectify the gender bias shown by commercial companies, little will be gained. A start has been made, with the voluntary sector setting up support groups for women computer users. Women Into Computing (WIC) is an organisation of higher education institutions which aims to remedy the low numbers of women entering computing courses: WIC held its first national conference in 1988. The American Women's Action Alliance have recommended a six step plan to increase the participation in computer activities by girls. Surely everyone associated with IT would want to endorse the words of Dr. Richard Riedl (1989) of Appalachian State University who wrote: "Educators need to make sure that in the process of increasing computer opportunities we do not, through inaction, cause any group to miss taking advantage of those opportunities."

A Strategy for Women in the Human Services

In the human services agency staff and student groups in educational establishments normally have a clear majority of women. How can they ensure that gender bias does not occur? A tempting answer for some is to keep new technologies at a distance, though such a view ought to be firmly resisted, not least because it is like trying to stop the tide coming in on the sea shore. Students and staff must face the challenge and opportunity of IT, and so need a strategy.

Despite the numerical dominance of women in the human services, internal divisions tend to concentrate males, and give them dominance in senior management groups, leaving female majorities at the points of service delivery. Hence the first two elements of a strategy become clear:

1. Staff in the human services must counter any broader tendency to gender discrimination, and ensure that their agencies are in the forefront or mainstream of IT applications.

2. Because, within the services, men maintain control of senior management, it is vital to ensure that IT applications are not just a management preserve, but are fully available at the front line of service provision.

These points relate to the framework of IT in the human services, the agency infrastructure, and to the wider context of gender-based features in our agencies. Implementing such broad aims requires careful attention to internal planning and the organisation of systems, to IT configurations, and to decisions about the uses to which computers are to be put, the software made available. The deployment of male and female staff within agencies such as social services departments generates an inevitable gender dimension to the debate about organisational centralisation and devolution. Put crudely, a strongly centralised structure leaves greater power in the hands of male dominated senior management groups; whereas devolution of resource control and other operation matters to front line locations offers more scope and influence to the female majority. IT configurations can closely parallel organisational structures, basing centralisation on a mainframe machine to which all remote terminals are linked, or strengthening devolution by promoting local computer networks and computing self-sufficiency in local offices. So the third point of a strategy would be:

3. Women staff in human services agencies should recognise that, as a group, they have a vested interest in devolved systems of management and IT.

The previous paragraph mentioned choices of software, and again, given the gender distribution of agency staff, the programs in use do have relevance. Agency management information systems, including computerised personnel records, tend to serve senior managers, and therefore empower male groups. Software which directly helps clients, or improves

the effectiveness and productivity of service delivery, such as the welfare benefits packages reviewed elsewhere in this issue of *New Technology in the Human Services*, empower the predominantly female staff groups. Therefore a fourth guideline might be:

> 4. Software for the human services, though most unlikely to be intrinsically gender biased, can have an impact on empowering and improving the effectiveness of specific staff groups. Women need to be aware of the software which empowers them.

Some of the issues outlined above have already been given a great deal of attention in human services agencies. The balance of centralised and devolved responsibility has, for example, featured on many agency agendas and in their restructuring plans. To a lesser though still significant extent the politics of IT configurations and applications has also been debated. The gender dimension of these debates appears to have gone almost unrecognised, despite some accusing fingers pointed at the shortage of women senior managers. Perhaps a direct challenge to traditional male preserves is too threatening, or provokes a male backlash too easily: maybe a more subtle approach through a manipulation of developing IT systems would be more effective in the long term.

References

Gerver.E, 1989, reported in *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 24.2.89.

Munger.G.F and Loyd.B.H, 1989, Gender Attitudes Towards Computers and Calculators, *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, Vol.5 No.2, pp.167-177.

Riedl.R, 1989, The Computer and Gender, *The Catalyst*, Vol.7 No.2.

Sanders.J, 1987, *Do your female students say "no thanks" to the computer?*, Women's Action Alliance, New York.

HUMAN SERVICES COMPUTING: THE STATE OF THE ART

David Phillips

The beginning of a decade is an appropriate, if unoriginal, occasion to take stock. Early 1990 is a uniquely propitious time to do so in relation to the use of Information Technology (IT) in the human services because the most ambitious and extensive exercise in publishing in this field has just been completed. It comprises comprehensive documentation of the unique Human Service Information Technology Applications (HUSITA) conference which took place in Autumn 1987. HUSITA brought together almost all the world's leading academics and IT specialists in the field of new technology in the human services.

During the conference 150 papers were presented, and by now over three-quarters of these have been published. This repository of half a million or so words comprises a unique contemporary record of the state of the art (or science) of human services computing. Almost all of the papers appear either in book form or else in previous issues of this journal, or in *Computer Use in Social Services Network* (CUSSNet).

CUSSNet is the least accessible of these sources to British readers: it is a newsletter, information exchange and software clearing house emanating from the University of Texas. It has an international perspective but is heavily oriented to the USA. Its main focus is on the more technical aspects of IT in the human services rather than on conceptual areas. HUSITA papers are published in CUSSNet vol 8.4 1988 and vol 8.5 1989. Some papers from mainland Europe are included but there are none from the UK. Most are technical in nature (dealing with, for example, networking or ergonomics) but there are some of more general interest. For example, Jean Harrod offers a cautionary tale about accuracy problems in collecting data about child abuse for management information systems (MIS). The papers most likely to have the widest interest are both on human services practitioners' response to new technology. John Gandy

reports on a generally encouraging research project in 51 Canadian agencies where staff resistance to IT was less than anticipated. Rami Benbenishty discusses the design of information systems specifically planned to meet the needs of social work practitioners.

HUSITA papers published in vol 4.1 and 4.2 of *New Technology in the Human Services* (NTHS) are in general more scholarly than those in CUSSNet and some are very wide ranging in nature. An example of this is Ram Cnaan's 'Computer Illiteracy and the Human Services' (NTHS vol 4.1 pp. 3-8). This confronts the major social issue of the relationship between access to new technology and the structure of inequality within society, with particular reference to the possible role for the human services in helping to empower disadvantaged groups. Hans Brinckmann, on the other hand, takes a radically different view of the proper role of the social services in relation to computing. In his paper, 'Rise or Fall of the Expert: the Position of the Service Worker in a High Tech Environment' (NTHS vol 4.2 pp. 19-24), he uncompromisingly insists that the human services need to adapt their work practices in order to make them more amenable to computerisation. "Service work has to be restructured and adapted to the requirements of the hard and software offered on the market." The themes which emerge from these two diametrically opposed views re-emerge with a vengeance in the major HUSITA publication and will be revisited later.

The majority of papers are published in two books. *Information Technology and the Human Services* (Wiley, 1988) is the major source and is discussed at length below. The other: *A Casebook of Computer Applications in the Social and Human Services* (Haworth, 1989) contains 21 papers, most of them short, most written by Americans. It is specifically designed to be used as course material at American educational institutions and the jacket notes claim that people "who have a minimal knowledge of information technology ... will find this volume readable and accessible." In general this is true, although there are one or two highly technical or conceptually difficult papers in the collection.

The first part of the book in particular seems to over-simplify the issues under discussion. The early chapters comprise short and rather bland papers sub-divided into 'bite-sized chunks'. I found myself getting irritated at the 'Discussion Points' inserted by the editors at the end of each chapter: eg. "Mandel argues that the diffusion of information technology into the human services has been uneven. Why do you think that this may be true?"

I was left with the impression that too much was being attempted in this volume. There is a need for an elementary introductory text on the area of IT in the human services, but it is stretching the bounds of credibility to try to compile such a text from conference papers which were not designed for this purpose. Some of the papers do hit the right note, though. Most of the papers in Chapter 4, on expert systems, were helpful and clear without being patronising.

However, one paper in that chapter was seriously out of place. Schwab and Wilson's discussion of the use of discriminant analysis in the creation of decision support systems (DSS) for foster care placements introduced some issues well beyond the comprehension of people with only a "minimal knowledge of information technology." The context did a disservice to the paper which was challenging and interesting and would probably have been better placed in the other, more scholarly, book.

The second half of the book - 'In Support of Service Planning and Administration' - was much stronger than the first, which was entitled 'In Support of Service Practice and Delivery.' In particular the thoughtful and informative chapter by the editors on 'IT for Service Planning and Administration' came as a pleasant surprise. The high points of the book for me were the papers by Laurie Ruberg on the use of cable technology in empowering service users, and by Riley and Ickes on empowering human service staff. The former is a detailed and intriguing account of the difficulties of implementing new technology via a partnership between public and private sector agencies. The latter was simple and straightforward without being facile, and was full of good advice on how to help staff to

make the best use of IT applications.

Just to confuse matters, as well as being published in book form, the *Casebook* is also distributed in two separate volumes as issues 1/2 and 3/4 of *Computers in Human Services*, volume 4. So if you have access to this journal then there is no point in buying the book. I suspect that most British readers would find the book of only limited
value anyway; those wanting an introduction to the subject would be better served by a more coherent text using British examples (eg. Glastonbury, 1985); whereas readers wanting more substantial fare or who are particularly interested in exploring US developments in some depth will probably find the other book more appropriate to their interests.

Information Technology and the Human Services, containing 42 papers, 430 pages and around a quarter of a million words, is unarguably the major source both of HUSITA papers and of information on contemporary developments across the whole spectrum of activities in human service computing. Around one quarter of the papers are of outstanding quality, and these alone make the book seem worth its hefty £46 price tag. Virtually every paper is worth reading and the cumulative knowledge gained from working through the whole book is well worth the effort.

Before going into detail about the book's good points, though, there are one or two important general criticisms which need to be made. The first is about presentation: the quality of the printing is poor, the typeface is too small, and the layout is cramped (eg there are no spaces between paragraphs). The overall effect is of too much material being crammed into a restricted space. Secondly, many of the papers are poorly referenced and there is no overall bibliography. Also, structuring a large, eclectic and diffuse collection of conference papers is no easy task. The book is divided into four parts. Part I 'Consumer Focus' has two chapters: 'Information Systems and the Consumer' and 'Using Technology with Clients'. Part II 'Agency Focus' comprises chapters entitled 'Education and Training' and 'Policy Development and Administration'. Part III 'Technology Focus' has chapters on 'Networking and Electronic Communication' and 'Systems Design and Development.' Part IV 'Focus on Politics and Ethics' has three: 'Empowerment'; 'Privacy, Information Ownership and Codes of Practice', and 'Technology Transfer and the Third World.' Every chapter has an editorial introduction, which is followed by between three and seven papers (except for the first and last chapters which are editorial overviews). This framework is probably no worse than any other which might have been adopted, but I was left with the uneasy feeling that it must have been possible to give readers more help in finding their way through the material. I would have appreciated a keyword index system so that a reader with an interest in, say, child protection could instantly make their way to relevant papers. In fact the complete lack of any form of index is a major omission.

There were three themes which came to my attention while reading the book which exemplify this problem. First, 'empowerment' does have a chapter of its own, but there were papers elsewhere in the book which also addressed this issue: eg. by Merlott, Qvortrop, O'Connor, and Rush et al. Similarly, scattered through the text were examples of computer applications of proven effectiveness, eg. Epstein, Wilson, Thompson, Marlett, and Cassell and Fitter. Thirdly there were many examples of detailed descriptions of work in progress on experiments or service innovations: eg. Gripton et al, Reswick, Cnaan, Bellamy, Williams and Forrest, Qvortrop, LaMendola, and Ames et al.

Outstanding Contributions

The HUSITA Vision. Bryan Glastonbury, Walter LaMendola and Stuart Toole provide thought-provoking and at times almost inspirational material in the first and last chapters of the book. In the introductory chapter, after identifying themselves as 'apostles' of IT, they start off on a gloomy note, summarising many of the problems in introducing IT to the human services. First they tackle the fundamental question about the assimilation of IT into day-to-day social work: the extent to which it may distort practice and dilute or remove "the flexibility and intuitiveness of response which is so vital in

helping people." Associated with this at a practical level is the very real fear felt by a large proportion - possibly a majority - of practitioners about the technology itself. Social work is often characterised as the last bastion of the non-numerate in an increasingly technological world, and much of this fear is a very basic mistrust and anxiety about the very mechanics of the technology.

Coupled with this is the generally uninspiring record of many previous attempts to computerise the human services in the recent past. Insensitive and overambitious attempts to implement MIS systems at too fast a pace and using inappropriate technology have left their scars. As a backdrop to this they also remind us of the undeniably negative image of much new technology. Innovations in IT have been generated by the appetites of both the military, forever trying to find more effective deterrence by endlessly creating more powerful weapons, and of big business in its thoroughgoing search for more efficient and resource-effective (ie. impersonal) ways of increasing profit and expanding market share.

In the final chapter they return to this theme with more optimism. Their solution to the bad press engendered by the history of ineffective and/or dehumanising IT applications in the Human Services is to counterattack: "to develop IT applications which are proactive in terms of the purposes, values and goals of their organisation, their discipline and the social mission they feel they must perform." To do this it is necessary to overcome problems of funding (particularly and essentially funding for staff training), staff orientation, and the social work knowledge base. These issue will be returned to later. The thrust of this pro-activity needs to encompass consumer or client problems of human rights, participation, privacy, client empowerment and the promotion of human welfare in general.

Most of the developments to date, even the most effective and widely accepted applications, have been specifically oriented to the needs of human services management. Applications of direct and explicit benefit to the human service process - to the worker-client interface - and therefore of direct and tangible benefits to the clients themselves, have not been so successful. They have tended to have got stuck at the prototype stage - or even earlier - through lack of funding or support.

The editors see this as the major challenge of the future. They point out that many of the presently available IT tools are not yet adequate to the task of human services work; its flexibility and individual responsiveness is extremely difficult to encompass within a computerised system. They say:

> "The objective has to be to produce applications which 'strike a chord' and have real meaning to practitioners, by modelling the entire helping process, and using the worker/client transaction as the starting point."

Their review of the scope for future developments in IT in the human services is well informed, elegant and thought-provoking. It is one of the most succinct and well balanced overviews of the possibilities - and of the obstacles to their realization - which has been published. The authors are determinedly optimistic: at times they may appear to be too evangelical, but the strength of their analysis lies in their ability to temper their enthusiasm with realism.

Success Story. If there is one paper which must be read by every practising social worker and every cynic - or anyone who is downright hostile to the notion of using computers in the human services - then it has to be 'Information Systems and the Consumer' by Joyce Epstein. Here is an example of a large scale experiment using computers which not only worked but was an outstanding success. Over a period of one year a sophisticated and comprehensive welfare benefits package designed to be used (without assistance) by inquirers was tested in nine different sites: DHSS Social Security offices, Unemployment Benefits Offices, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, a Social Services Department, a neighbourhood centre, and a hypermarket. Epstein's research team followed up 400 users and investigated their reactions. The experiment proved to be an overwhelming success for all groups of users, young, old,

male, female, working class, middle class. "And they liked using the computer; more than merely 'liked' it - they came away from the computer positively euphoric." More than this, the users by a very wide margin preferred the computer to any other way of gaining welfare benefits information. They got an additional bonus too: "About a third of the people who used the computer for some specific reason found out that they may be entitled to an entirely separate benefit that they hadn't even been enquiring about." This was in marked contrast to their treatment at DHSS offices where the onus was upon them to specify the benefits they were applying for.

Workers' views were radically different: "social workers in particular? They hated it. Perhaps hate is too strong a word. They actively ignored it." There is not enough space here to do justice to Epstein's analysis, or to give more information on the sorry response from social workers, but the overwhelming finding is that consumers in general, and social work clients in particular, were very enthusiastic about the technology and found it useful and financially beneficial, whereas their social workers were unenthusiastic and did not take cognisance of the benefits accruing to their clients. No wonder then that she comes to the conclusion that clients' interests are largely ignored in what new IT developments do take place in the personal social services.

On the basis of these findings Epstein develops a set of criteria and guidelines for the introduction of new technology if it is to provide a good consumer-oriented service. These are of fundamental importance and they need to be addressed in any client-oriented IT in the human services.

Computerising Social Work. The problems and opportunities associated with using computers in social work settings are the subject area of a large part of the book, but there are four outstanding contributions which need to be highlighted. Their importance cannot easily be ascertained by looking through the contents pages - indeed the articles are situated in different sections and chapters and their interrelated themes are not made explicit in the editorial summaries (and, of course, there is no index).

Sandra Williams and Jan Forrest in 'Technology on Trial' take up some of the issues raised by Epstein, but here the focus is the tensions between management and workers within the agency over the introduction of new technology instead of between the agency and the client. The message about the reactions of social workers to new technology, though, is the same: "Our general impression of the social workers' reactions towards the innovation of office automation was largely one of negative attitudes." Some of the reasons too are the same: fear and ignorance of the unknown, embarrassment at the possibility of making mistakes, distrust over reliability, computer jargon, anxieties over confidentiality, and a generalised opposition to pigeon-holing and standardizing clients. All but the last two also emerged from Epstein's study. These fears tended to be generalised and 'historic' rather than being based specifically on the technology in front of them. It also related to the predominant use of IT for information systems exclusively for management purposes.

The authors have some stern words for managers on this score. They emphasise that information systems must be used for the professional benefit of practitioners for their introduction to be successful. They point to the real difficulty of integrating new technology into the culture and routine of social work practice, but warn that "managers will need to learn to use, not abuse, the values and culture of social work." The article finishes with a list of key factors for good practice in implementing new technology in social services departments.

This theme is taken up further in a very important, challenging and substantial paper by James Gripton, Paul Licker and Leo de Groot, 'Microcomputers in Clinical Social Work.' It starts by emphasising the paucity of good programs in the human services, despite evidence which shows that clients generally respond positively to computers. This is followed by a review of social work applications and a discussion of a long-term decision support system (DSS) developed by the authors. They take an uncompromising stance

on the introduction of new technology: they insist that social workers will have to change their ways if new technology is to be effectively introduced. For example, they claim that effective computerisation of clinical records "requires social workers to make fundamental shifts in how they think about cases, observe clients and record clinical events." This is a controversial position and will be looked at in more detail later, but it is fair to say that it probably reflects the dominant ethos within the personal social services, at least at management level.

Their discussion of an attempt to introduce a wide-ranging DSS in a family therapy setting makes interesting reading. While claiming that developing professional support systems is potentially the most rewarding aspect of new technology in the human services, they nevertheless keep their feet solidly on the ground by pointing out that DSSs are extremely costly and time-consuming in an area as imprecise and (in decision-making terms) nebulous as social work intervention.

They created the DSS framework by first investigating the information requirements of family therapists. They then analyzed how therapists made clinical decisions by observing and recording group supervision sessions and interviewing individual therapists about their method of working. The final outcome was an integrated software package centred upon a clinical database program which comprises client descriptions, assessment file, intervention file, and evaluation file. Family map programs, resource programs and an information system all feed into the package, as does the Personal Consulting Decision Support System (PCDSS). The PCDSS is designed to simulate the way that human consultants or supervisors give advice. Its method, though, is somewhat mechanistic. It is based upon 'similarity functions' in that it refers to other families which have some similar attributes to the one under discussion, and it gives the success rates for different therapy types in these previous cases. The method is explained in detail in the text and is worth studying.

The authors do not give an evaluation of the package, but they do say that three important constraints need to be overcome if its potential is to be fully realized. First, we are told that the characteristics of the clinical data and the way they are used by social workers must be substantially modified. This task is one not likely to be taken on board by social workers "without convincing demonstration of the practice gains that will be forthcoming." The second problem lies in the quality of social work measurement data, not only in terms of inputs, but of outputs also - measures of actual practice effectiveness. Thirdly, and by far the most problematic "the underlying logic of PCDSS applications is a linear model of cause and effect, whereas popular theories of family therapy are based upon cybernetic models." This total mismatch in the structure and process of reasoning appears to be a fundamental barrier to the use of the present generation of DSSs in modelling the more complex and holistic aspects of social work decision-making.

Following this sobering description of a DSS in action, the authors move on to a wide ranging and excellent discussion of general administrative and human relations issues in the introduction of computers to clinical practice. After exploring aspects of the rationale for introducing computers into clinical social work practice, they give a perceptive overview of the possible good, bad and indifferent consequences of computerisation. Along the way they explore different possible responses of social workers to new technology, and they produce a flow chart which should be framed and placed on the office wall of everyone who wants to introduce computers into social work settings. The algorithm deals with the steps necessary in planning a computerised system and highlights basic issues of interest, commitment, resources and practicality. It does not ignore the different needs of managers and practitioners and - a sobering reminder of reality - has an awful lot of arrows which point to the box entitled "ABANDON COMPUTERIZATION PLAN."

Clive Miller and Elizabeth Cordingley tackle a similar problem to Gripton et al - in this case the focus is on the possibility of producing an expert system on non-accidental injury (NAI) to children. But their approach is much more cautious and painstaking, as can be gathered from the long-winded title of their paper:

'Structuring Initial Conversations on Expert Systems Between Social Work Staff and Software Engineers.' Do not be put off: this paper carefully and meticulously explores that fundamental interface between human service professionals and IT professionals. Instead of rushing ahead without heed to possible consequences, the authors decided to set in motion (albeit slow-motion) a process of patient dialogue between the two groups, who would have to learn to understand each other if a product that was genuinely useful to social work was to be created.

They started with the following humble premise: "The possibility that there are some aspects of social work for which an expert system is appropriate is *worth exploring*" (emphasis added). They set up three half day meetings between software engineers and social workers from different agencies who had an interest in NAI. The context of their discussion was that of 'expert' rather than 'decision support' system. This was because of the complex nature of NAI and the specific attributes of experts: their ability to make creative leaps, to take safe shortcuts, to explain the reasoning which led them to specific conclusions, and their ability to handle uncertainty and deal with unclear information. It is, of course, enormously difficult to model 'expert' behaviour - it is very much easier to use the linear regression equations which lie at the heart of DSSs - but in principle at least, this road as to be the right one to take, no matter how rocky it is.

The authors identify an 'upside' to using computers in this context: they can provide information only otherwise available from an expert whom the worker may not be able to contact: they provide an emotionally neutral decision-making environment: and finally they can be used effectively to keep track of the progress of cases. A potential 'downside' is also identified (and perhaps caricatured): of computers being too mechanistic: that they will anyway be ignored by workers: and having major ethical problems.

This then was the general context of the first 'conversation' between social workers and IT experts. The first thing they had to do was to get to know each other, so they met in small groups over lunch and explained their perspectives to each other. Then, in classic groupwork tradition, the social workers were asked to present their understanding of the work of the IT specialists, and vice versa. This may seem a cumbersome and even banal procedure, but it pays big dividends in ironing out any initial misconceptions as well as breaking down social and professional barriers. After this other groupwork techniques (brainstorming, etc.) were used to try to describe systematically activities central to NAI work and the potential uses of expert systems within this context.

At the second meeting two prototype expert systems from other settings were demonstrated, and then the rest of the time was devoted to trying to identify an adequate framework for describing possible uses of expert systems in NAI work. This was not easy, and no concrete results were forthcoming. Yet the authors make the point that in spite of this, much was achieved in terms of clarifying understanding of each other's positions: "Practitioners were becoming clearer about some of the key software engineering issues", and "Designers were becoming aware of the range of contexts."

At the third meeting another prototype was demonstrated: in this case a SSD 'Extra Care Housing' expert system. Then the group tried, apparently without too much success, to identify criteria for evaluating the potential of proposed developments. Finally they identified possible ways forward. In spite of the at times painfully slow progress, they agreed that the effort in creating a prototype expert system in NAI would be justified on condition it got effective support.

Painstaking, slow and careful work of this kind is essential if the overall proactive goal of HUSITA is to be achieved - that of imbuing the human services with the benefits which can accrue from the effective and appropriate implementation of new technology.

Finally amongst the outstanding papers in the area of computerising social work practice is another contribution on the area of child abuse, but with a radically different focus. Whereas

Miller and Cordingly had their feet planted firmly on the ground, Dick Schoech and Stuart Toole's paper, 'An Approach to Cross Cultural Knowledge Engineering in the Domain of Child Welfare', sets its sights unequivocally upwards and outwards. At first sight their aim - to produce internationally transferable software on the vexed question of child abuse - may seem fanciful, but there is much to be said for taking their approach seriously. It forces us to sit up and take note, and to investigate the notion of transferable social work skills; and it does address the problem we will confront later of the difficulty of funding practice-oriented as opposed to management-oriented software. If resources are not available within individual countries, then perhaps they need to be pooled. This is another facet of the vision of the future of social work computing which emerged from HUSITA.

Their overall aim is to connect 'predicting information' and 'decision-making' in child abuse work. This will be very expensive so it makes sense to take a cross-cultural approach. After reviewing the rather limited developments in the UK and USA they come up with the following protocol:

1. establish knowledge which is consistent across cultures

2. develop a test knowledge-base which is culturally free

3. test this knowledge-base in several cultures

4. establish knowledge which changes across cultures

5. establish ways of adding any cultural perspective with minimum knowledge-base changes and system reorganization

6. develop and test the culturally specific knowledge base

7. customize the culturally specifically knowledge to several cultures

8. test and refine the total expert system in several cultures

In principle this is exciting and innovative, but it needs very much more development before it can be useful as an environment within which the slow and careful steps alluded to above can be taken. Nevertheless it does provide an alternative perspective of seminal value: even if it is not directly useable, it gives us food for thought and perhaps even a little inspiration.

Empowering Clients, Enhancing Citizenship. Three papers in this collection tackled an even larger issue than that of cross national child care programs: that of the use of computers to enable service users to become less dependent upon social workers and to take more control over their own lives.

Nancy Marlett in 'Empowerment Through Telecommunications', discusses the development in Canada of a computerised information system open to all people with disabilities and to anyone who wishes to improve their status. This system is based upon what Marlett calls a 'citizenship' model as opposed to a 'professional' model of service delivery. Her normative standpoint is that "whereas professional models within human services hold information and dispense it to those within their closed systems, citizenship development and self help movements rely on full and meaningful access to information."

For some people whose life chances had been severely diminished by physical disability the development of appropriate computer technology has resulted in the possibility of a major enhancement of quality of life, and even, through electronic networks, communicating on equal terms with non-disabled people and achieving equality of status. Marlett chronicles the development of a service aimed to achieve these ends and analyses in detail the activities of the 850 service users, including 34 specialist bulletin boards. The specific principles of the system are: user control, local ownership, access for people who do not use a computer, assisting inter-communication between different associations (particularly those dealing with different types of disabilities, such as linking groups of deaf people with groups of blind people), and to encourage partnerships (eg. between researchers and service-users, people

with, and people without disabilities, etc.).

Drawing upon the experience of getting such a large scale national network up and running, Marlett concluded that there had been "a paradigmatic shift from providing services to devalued persons to one of partnership in the creation of a new communications medium." She also claimed that the project demonstrated that "computer telecommunications eliminate the stigma associated with disability by allowing people to communicate without the barriers associated with visible or apparent aspects of the disabling condition."

Edis Bevan in 'The Task for a New Professionalism' takes a similar position to Marlett on the issue of disability, but expands it to take on board the plight of underprivileged people in general and citizens of third world countries in particular. This is heady stuff: he takes to the high ground of moral imperatives and insists that human services professionals have an obligation to take a leading role in the development and dissemination of IT, in order to endow it with as much social integrity as possible (thus echoing Cnaan's argument, mentioned above).

He too advocates 'citizen' based software. He takes as his starting point the UNESCO MacBride Report which advocates the recognition of a 'right to communicate.' He sees a crucial factor as being the bad fit in the relationship "between people with disabilities and the world as designed for able-bodied living." Citizen based applications are designed to enable disabled and other socially devalued people to control their lives, in contrast to his view of 'client' based applications which reinforce status degradation. His analogy with the third world is a perceptive one: it is seen as dependent and unable to cope. "Disasters and strife get reported in the third world: positive development initiatives are ignored."

His position on the parallels between individual disability and the problems of world development and its implications for human services workers is unequivocal. He states: "The debate on this world problem and how it should be met goes to the heart of the problem of empowerment faced by the human services in particular." In the same way that people with disabilities ought to be centrally involved in a partnership to further develop their empowerment then so too he claims should third world peoples.

Citing Chambers' work on third world development strategies he highlights the dangers of a 'top-down' approach which ignores the reality of life as perceived by citizens. As well as the issue of principle there are consequences of this approach which are of practical import to the issue of IT in the human services. The technological tools of aiding development - computers - are often inappropriately programmed. They can cope with 'hard' data, even if it is not relevant to citizen's needs, but they find it more difficult to cope with less easily categorisable information, even if this is more relevant. The accrued knowledge and expertise of third world citizens - not to mention their wishes and aspirations - are most probably in this latter category. Following the arguments of Howarth he claims that the *technical* challenge of incorporating these 'human factors' into information systems for world development (or for empowerment of any other group) calls for the work of an entirely new profession: "A new kind of expert is needed, a new professional devoted to representing the interests of the citizens, who treats the citizens as equal partners."

This new profession would be involved in initiating 'bottom up' development respecting the experience and knowledge of the citizens. And he exhorts social workers and other human service professionals to take a leading role in the development of this new profession: "Because human service professionals at their best are concerned with people as people not as cases, with citizens not clients, they are in a position to tackle the problem of expressing tacit knowledge in the electronic age."

The common strand which Bevan identifies as running through the work of all human service professionals, be they social caseworkers, people who work alongside people with disabilities, community workers, community development workers, or even world development workers - that of respect for the underdog and a vocation to empower the

disempowered on terms of equal citizenship - may in practice be less than fully operationalised. But this ethical stance is central to a concept of social justice in the human services, and he is right to confront us with it. The leap from this position to that of insisting that human services workers are properly placed to staff this new profession is a bold one. Its justification has to be made on polemical or normative grounds. Whether one wishes to make this leap is a personal matter, but one cannot deny the congruence between the two professional areas, just as one cannot deny the parallels between the position of disabled people and people in the third world. Edis Bevan has done us a great service - and perhaps made some feel uncomfortable - by drawing these connections.

The final paper amongst those I have chosen - and indeed the final paper in the book before the editors' concluding words - takes Bevan's arguments even further. Joaquin Tan in 'Making Technology Serve Humanity' takes not the third world but the whole world as his frame of reference. His paper is not addressed only or even specifically to human service workers, but to all people who care about the future of the world and the role of new technology in shaping it. He refers to Galtung's view of technology as a carrier of codes (using the analogy from genetics) - economic, social, cultural and even cognitive - throughout the world. He deprecates what he sees as the role of new technology in perpetuating and exacerbating inequality and dependency.

His message is unapologetically polemical and exhortatory. His ultimate message is "We must view humanity as an unbroken wholeness acting on the world with a purpose in this day and age to realize itself as one humanity and practice it as a reality. There is no they and we but only us."

This was a fitting note on which to end the first ever international conference on the use of IT in the Human Services.

References

Glastonbury.B, 1985, *Computers in Social Work*, London, Macmillan, £4.95.

HUSITA Sources:
Computer Use in Social Services Network, (Editor: Dick Schoech), University of Texas at Arlington, Box 19129, Arlington, Texas.
New Technology in the Human Services, (Editor: Bryan Glastonbury)
Glastonbury.B, LaMendola.W and Toole.S, 1988, *Information Technology and the Human Services*, Chichester, UK, Wiley, £46
LaMendola.W, Glastonbury.B and Toole.S, 1989, *A Casebook of Computer Applications in the Social and Human Services*, New York, Haworth.

The author is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, and Editor of Programs in Practice (PIP).

** ATTENTION SOCIAL WORK TEACHERS **

Three CTI Centres, Psychology, Sociology and Social Policy, and Human Services are planning regional meetings in York (April 19/20), Stirling (7/8) and Southampton (July). Each meeting will start mid-morning and last until early afternoon the next day. There will be discussion, demonstrations and hands-on opportunities to try a range of software. The Centre for Human Services will be demonstrating the welfare benefits programs reviewed in this journal.

The intention is to offer one place to each social work course in the region. We would like to attract teachers with a commitment to computer developments. If you are interested, please contact Jackie Rafferty, Ann Wilkinson or Bryan Glastonbury at Southampton University. The phone is 0703 595000 ext.3536, 2779 or 2629. JANET is SSI012 at UK.AC.IBM.SOTON.

We will plan other meetings for social work teachers in Northern Ireland and other human service teachers nationally.

