

## **Six years of evaluating the DRC Helpline**

**Summary report prepared by Ricability  
October 2007**

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## **Introduction**

From September 2001 Ricability was commissioned to carry out an independent and continuous evaluation of the Disability Rights Commission Helpline. This was based on telephone interviews with random samples of callers.

These included questions on satisfaction with key aspects of the service, descriptive details of calls and their outcomes and collected suggestions on how the Helpline could be improved.

The surveys developed to reflect the changing priorities of the DRC but continued until May 2007.

This final report, which marks the end of this evaluation as the DRC becomes part of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, summarised the main findings and, by way of a legacy for the CEHR, the implications for the running of a successful helpline for disabled people.

## Background

### The DRC Helpline

In 2000 the Disability Rights Commission was established as a new organisation with a remit that was almost entirely without precedent. Its role was to be responsible for the development, management and enforcement for the Disability Discrimination Act . the first piece of civil rights legislation in the UK.

The DRC gave priority from the beginning to services to disabled people. A helpline, conciliation service and casework department were set up to provide an interlocking set of support services.

The Helpline was to provide information directly to disabled people and to service providers who needed information about how the legislation would affect their business. For disabled people its primary task was to answer questions about the legislation, advise them what their rights were, and help the recognise discrimination and take action against it. Education and employment were added to the Helpline's remit as different stages of the DDA became law.

It became immediately apparent that the demand for the Helpline was far greater than had been anticipated. Originally set up to fulfil requests for publications it soon was receiving some 100,000 requests for information a year.

The Helpline adopted several core principles from the outset. The most notable were that

- All calls should be free to the caller
- Information would be available in the main languages spoken in the UK, including Welsh
- The Helpline would as a matter of routine operate beyond normal working hours to make sure that no one was denied access if they could not call during the day
- Call staff would be trained to a level unusual for call centres.
- Call staff were encouraged to take the time to explore the situation of each caller, rather than have targets intended to maximise speed

Changes were made as the Helpline developed:

The number of people who were referred to a caseworker tapered off as test cases and precedents were established until casework ceased to be offered.

The Helpline was reorganised into tiers to reduce waiting times. The first tier answered all calls and dealt with routine enquiries such as arranging for publications to be sent out. The second tier dealt with more substantive questions.

The second tier of the Helpline was reorganised into divisions which specialised in education, employment and goods and services.

December 2003 . in order to focus resources on disabled people, larger organisations (over 200 employees) were directed to information on the website or to other specialist organisations. Information and advice continued to be supplied to smaller concerns.

Successive improvements to the computer system made it easier for staff to log the details of each query and share this information if the caller spoke to more than one person.

March 2003 . DRC Helpline began asking enquirers to use mailforms to contact them.

May 2003 . the Helpline implemented a call queuing system instead of calling clients back.

March 2004 . the DRC website was updated and renovated

A new service HelpLive was launched.

### **The evaluation**

The DRC commissioned an independent evaluation of the Helpline in 2001. This was done to provide an unbiased measure of its success and to provide day to day information that could be used to improve the service. Information was based on telephone interviews with separate samples of individual callers (disabled people and

those who advised them) and professional callers (service providers and their advisors).

Over the period of the research the questionnaire was modified and refined in the light of practical experience although certain core questions remained as standard. Additional questions were also added to reflect the changing interests of the DRC. The main changes made to the survey are outlined below.

### *Sampling and reporting*

From September 2001 40 interviews a month were carried out . thirty were with individual callers and their advisors and ten were with professional callers. The findings of these surveys were reported monthly. From January 2004 this was changed to 100 interviews (80 individual and 20 professional callers) a quarter and reports were written quarterly. Later the number of interviews with professional callers was increased to 30.

From January 2005, the evaluation took a different form. As well as a standard structured questionnaire, topic guides were used to capture in depth information about particular subjects. These topics were changed each quarter, and were chosen by the DRC. Reports continued to appear quarterly, but were in two parts:

- Information on the Helpline's basic performance on a number of key indicators were given as a series of graphs, which collectively make up an index of *trends and satisfaction*.
- Each quarter a qualitative report looked at a particular aspect of the service.

Throughout the survey all samples were randomly drawn from the DRC's computer record of callers.

## **Summary**

### **General**

#### **Consistency**

Over the six years of the survey 1878 individual and 802 professional callers were interviewed. It is notable that throughout this period the opinions we recorded of the Helpline remained remarkably consistent. The Helpline began on a high note and maintained this standard throughout its life.

Thus early on we were able to report that since the start of the research the DRC Helpline has been highly regarded by those interviewed. Callers have consistently expressed high levels of satisfaction with the service in general and have praised the standard of information it has provided. In particular, the sympathetic attitude of the staff and their level of knowledge impressed callers from the beginning.

#### **Significance of the DRC and Helpline**

From the beginning both the DRC and the Helpline emerged as being of significant importance to its callers. Interviews consistently showed that it was a unique resource to a great number of people. Few people could think of any alternative they might turn to if the DRC was not there. When asked in 2007 nearly three quarters of those who had used the Helpline said that it would now be the first port of call if they wanted information about their rights as a disabled person in the future. Further, most of them considered that there would be no need to approach any other organisation since they were confident that if the DRC could not answer their questions directly they would expect the Helpline to tell them who else to go to.

Belief in the DRC was reinforced by the quality of information provided by the Helpline which was seen to be clear, practical and relevant.

*Empowerment.* Apart from establishing itself as the natural focus for disability rights information and providing direct practical assistance, the Helpline also empowered callers by giving them the confidence they needed to proceed with the case. The majority of respondents claimed that the Helpline had enhanced their understanding of their rights, at least as far as these were relevant to the individual

circumstances of their case. Nearly two thirds of respondents claimed they would be more confident about arguing for fair treatment in future because of their dealings with the Helpline. This was because the Helpline had been able to confirm that a caller had rights under the DDA and were able to describe the successful outcomes of similar cases. Often confidence was boosted further because respondents knew that there was help around or that they could get further support if required.

*Quality.* The feature singled out most frequently by individual callers was the attitude of the staff on the Helpline. Over nine out of ten respondents praised their helpful or friendly approach and felt that the information or advice they were given was clear. Just over four fifths thought that the staff were knowledgeable. Nine out of ten respondents said they would use the Helpline again. Callers had much to say in praise of the service and comparatively few criticisms.

## Individual callers

### **Publicity**

Early on the survey simultaneously recorded the great importance of the Helpline to disabled people and the fact that a high proportion of them came across the DRC by chance. As an early report pointed out, people could only contact the DRC Helpline if they knew what it did and how to contact it. Many callers who were impressed by the help they had received considered that it needed more publicity if it was to meet the needs of a high proportion of disabled people.

It was encouraging that a wide variety of mainstream organisations (CABx, ACAS, local councils, solicitors etc) had referred people on to the DRC. This was both practical and timely. Somewhat disappointing was the fact that comparatively few people were directed to the DRC by disability organisations. perhaps because these organisations were not approached first for help with discrimination issues. Word of mouth remained an important source of information about the DRC throughout the lifetime of the survey, and accounted for some of the misconceptions of what the DRC could offer. The internet increased in importance as a source of referral. Links from other sites were important as were speculative searches.

For more details see [Sources of information about the DRC](#)

### **Satisfaction**

High levels of satisfaction were recorded for each of the key aspects of the Helpline service measured. Satisfaction was closely related to expectation, and those who saw the DRC as an official organisation or one that was set up to represent disabled people tended to expect a higher level of practical support than the DRC was able to offer, particularly after its case worker service had been disbanded. Some people, judging by the DRC's name or by what they had been told expected an advocacy service or legal help akin to what might be provided by a solicitor.

Nevertheless nearly four fifths of individual callers were satisfied with the speed at which their query was dealt with and even more (85%) with the quality of information provided. Nearly three fifths of those whose cases had reached a conclusion were happy with this outcome.

For more details see [Expectations and satisfaction](#)

### **The process**

The Helpline was open into the evening, a policy that proved essential for those who could not call in working hours or needed some privacy. There were few problems getting through to the Helpline and although many had to queue to speak to a specialist advisor these were mainly of a tolerable length. Callers were less likely to resent queuing if their query was fully answered. Waiting for more than ten minutes caused some dissatisfaction and (rare) waits of over 30 minutes caused outright antagonism.

A widely applauded feature of the Helpline was the fact that advisors took enough time to understand the details of the case and discuss issues with the caller.

Some people contacted the Helpline after attempts to solve the problem with the aid of other organisations had failed. By this time the case had become urgent and in some cases not enough time was left for any effective action.

Some queries were made by email and letter. These media were deliberately chosen because a written record was needed,

because the medium was easier because of an impairment or because it offered more privacy than was possible on the phone. Those who chose to phone usually did so because it was easier to talk to a person and easier to explain the situation to a person than describe it in writing. Many preferred to get advice from a person in this way.

For more details see [The process](#)

### **Information provided by the Helpline**

The success of the Helpline largely depended on the calibre and training of its staff. Throughout the six years of the survey very high levels of satisfaction were recorded, rarely slipping below 75% on any of the four measures used to assess performance. Thus in addition to satisfaction with the quality of information (see above) large majorities consistently reported that Helpline staff took enough time to deal with their query, quickly grasped what the problem was and were fully conversant with the details by the end of the call. People who were dissatisfied wanted to have more detail or more directive personal guidance. Sometimes they wanted information that could not have been provided without close direct involvement with the case. Sometimes information was lacking because precedents had not been established through case law.

For more information see [Information provided by the Helpline](#)

### **Action taken**

In some cases callers were just seeking information, rather than advice on what action to take. Otherwise the Helpline outlined the steps the caller might take to resolve the issue, usually by outlining options. Details of relevant source of advice and information were provided where necessary. In some cases, particularly in the early days of the organisation, the DRC could offer direct help in some form. Around two third of individual respondents considered the balance between what the DRC provided and what they were asked to do for themselves was about right.

In the early days of the Helpline's existence direct help was offered to a high proportion of callers. As might be expected, satisfaction with any direct help offered were high, not least because this was usually over and above what they had expected to receive. Over eight out of ten of individual callers were satisfied with all that the

Helpline promised to do. The level of help offered was scaled down as time progressed. Most people accepted the reasons given for this, although discontent was increasingly expressed about the narrowness of the DRC's remit and on the paucity of casework help.

Those who were advised how to take action themselves found this advice clear and easy to follow. Nearly three fifths were happy to take on the work and most felt confident enough to carry it out. Generally the DRC's advice was followed to the letter and most found the task reasonably easy to complete.

Self help packs were used increasingly to help people through this process. Nearly all found these useful, and nearly four fifths said it was easy to understand. There were very few suggestions about how the self help pack could be improved. Some people wanted further simplification.

For more information see [Action taken](#)

### **Outcomes**

For 17% of individual callers no further action was needed. Callers were just seeking information. Nearly two fifths of cases were in progress at the time of the interview. The caller had contacted another party and was waiting for some form of response. In another fifth of cases the caller had decided to take no action.

Of the rest, 30% of all those that needed action - cases had either been won or legal proceedings initiated. Very few cases had been lost. 58% of callers whose cases had reached a conclusion were satisfied with its outcome. Cases that were resolved quickly had features in common. These were that the information required was fairly straightforward, callers were sufficiently reassured about the possibility of success and that the DRC's help was invoked early enough.

Cases that were unfinished at the time of the interview were mostly stalled while a response from the second party was awaited. Some people had become discouraged by lack of help or advocacy from the DRC or other source.

For more information see [Outcomes](#)

## Employers and service providers

### **Sources of information about the DRC**

Most employers and service providers credited their knowledge of the Helpline to information received from other organisations, the internet, word-of-mouth referrals from their networks of contacts and from literature provided by the DRC itself. As the survey progressed more people reported hearing about the DRC from non disability organisations. Disability organisations were not, and never had been, a significant source of information for them. Over time the internet gradually increased in importance for professionals and became a primary source of information.

For more information see [Sources of information about the DRC](#)

### **Expectations and satisfaction**

Employers and service providers mostly contacted the Helpline to seek an answer to a specific question. The majority . around three fifths . expected the DRC to be able to clarify details of any area covered by the DDA - access requirements, employment law and, later, education. They expected this advice to be quite specific and detailed. Nearly three quarters of professional callers were happy with the information they received. Those who were less satisfied wanted to have more prescriptive information than they were given. Sometimes they expected a more definitive ruling than the law or precedent made possible. Professional callers were impressed with the calibre of staff on the Helpline, just as individual callers had been.

### *Perceptions of bias*

While it was recognised that the DRC existed to act on behalf of disabled people, this was not seen as having an effect on the quality or reliability of information provided to others. The overwhelming majority of professional callers found that the DRC advisor did have a grasp of business perspectives. This not only contributed to the credibility of the DRC but meant discussions were more productive.

### *Awareness raising*

Over half of the employers and service providers interviewed felt that their contact with the DRC had improved their understanding; 12% said they had a good understanding already, and 36% said that their call to the DRC had not made any difference.

For more information see [Expectations and satisfaction](#)

### **Reasonable adjustments**

The term 'reasonable adjustment' was a source of uncertainty. A consistent complaint about the Helpline had been the fact that it could not make specific rulings on what adjustments might be considered reasonable because this was a matter for individual judgement or, ultimately, the courts. There was a tension between the need to get what one respondent called 'clear cut' advice and the difficulty of interpreting the general provisions of the law in the particular circumstances of the case.

For more information see [Reasonable adjustments](#)

### **Outcomes**

In all, just under half of the calls in the sample of employers and service providers resulted in advice about making some change to policy or practice.

When provided with such advice nearly everybody (86%) had either implemented whatever had been recommended by the Helpline or said they intended to do so. Over three quarters of professional callers were satisfied with this outcome.

For more information see [Outcomes](#)

### **Publications**

In the first six months of the survey we recorded that 64% of individual callers and 42% of professional enquirers had been sent DRC publications. Early on callers were sent a package of publications; this became more selective as the survey progressed.

Only in a minority of cases were publications seen as being important because they provided *more* information or additional background to what had been provided during the call. The value of publications were largely seen in terms of the extent to which they backed up, confirmed or augmented discussions with advisors. Their importance and main merit was in providing a permanent reference to what had been discussed.

The standard of DRC publications was thought to be high and they met the needs of the majority of callers. Publications were rated as being both easy to understand and useful by over four fifths of the sample; a high opinion that did not vary much during the lifetime of the survey, However some callers express a need for more detailed information. The three most common requests were for

- more situation-specific case studies to help callers who found it difficult to apply the information provided in DRC publications to their own circumstances
- technical details for service providers who were about to make adjustments to their premises or services. It may be that this could be done by providing references to appropriate specialist organisations or by providing information directly on the DRC's web-site
- clearer language, less jargon (mentioned mainly by those with learning difficulties).

DRC publications were produced to a standard design. This met with almost universal approval. Respondents singled out:

- the large type size and clear font. These were appreciated even by those without visual impairments
- clear navigation aids . contents page, clear headings with an obvious hierarchy and logical spacing
- use of colour
- plain English and avoidance of jargon.

Both electronic and paper publications had their supporters. On balance, individual callers tended to prefer paper while professional callers tended to consider electronic media more convenient.

However even those with IT equipment found lengthy information difficult to read on a screen. Paper was more portable, easier to handle and could be read in more comfortable circumstances. Some considered paper publications with the DRC logo on the cover carried more authority than print outs from the internet or email . a significant advantage if they were to be used to convince the other party in a dispute. Computer information did not meet the needs of some disabled people, particularly if they had to travel to a library or other public access point.

The main advantages of information on the internet were that it was more likely to be considered up to date, the fact that a particular piece of information could be identified and retrieved quickly, and it was easier to store than paper copies.

Information on the internet was often seen as being more suited to answering specific queries, while descriptive text, discussions and background information were often thought to be more appropriate (and easier to read) on paper.

For more information see [Publications](#)

### **Comparison with other Helplines**

Evidence that the DRC Helpline compared favourably with others came from two sources. Interviews carried out in the last quarter of 2006 asked respondents to compare the DRC service with their experience of using other helplines. In 2004 the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) carried out a detailed survey of problems experienced by individual callers and CAB advisors who had contacted a call centre in the last two years. Overall callers were more satisfied with the performance of the DRC Helpline than callers were with those rated by the CAB survey respondents.

DRC callers identified the following as being criteria for a good helpline service:

- advisors who have an expert understand of their subject, and who can explain it clearly
- advisors who are courteous, pleasant and sympathetic
- advisors who take time to listen patiently, and who do not to make callers feel stupid or inadequate
- advisors who can help distraught callers to calm down
- phones answered by a person
- minimum waiting times

In the Ricability interviews, the DRC Helpline emerged on nearly all of these counts as having a higher standard than other helplines used by callers. The calibre of its staff and the quality of the information they provided was highly praised. Areas in which the DRC particularly excelled were:

*Initial contact.* Long waits, automated queuing systems and recorded menus were widely disliked and the DRC was commended for avoiding these and for putting callers through to a person quickly. It was clear that automated menu systems had particular disadvantages for disabled people and the fact that the DRC had never used these was appreciated. These were also heavily criticised by the CAB research.

*Quality of information.* The DRC emerged as a clear leader and standard setter as far as quality of information was concerned. Advisors were seen as knowledgeable and expert and also displayed considerable empathy. Equally important was the time they took to listen and discuss the detail of the situation. To some extent these qualities were shared by helplines run by charities that represented disabled people while more commercial operations were criticised for being rushed or giving the impression that the information provided was read from a script (and not always understood by the advisor).

Professional callers were also complimentary about the DRC helpline, scoring it highly on the quality of its information, calibre of staff and general efficiency. Most had found it easy to get through to and commended its extended opening hours and avoidance of automated answering systems.

The knowledge and expertise of its staff was also a positive feature and, unlike other helplines, the DRC was not criticised by anybody for the quality of the information it provided.

Specific suggestions for improvement were:

- indication of how long the caller might wait in a queue
- a method of briefing advisors before the call
- a specialised dedicated legal service

For more information see [DRC compared to other Helplines](#)

### **The DRC website**

Awareness of the website was high among respondents who had internet access and that three quarters of them had visited the site at some time. Use of the website was pragmatic. Employers and

service providers used it only when they needed to, so their frequency of use depended very much on their job and responsibilities. Individuals used the site less frequently and the number of times they visited it depended on the progress of their case. In both groups only a small number of people kept in regular contact with the website to keep up to date or from general interest.

Just over nine out of ten of those who had visited the site found it very or fairly easy to use. Just over three fifths of those who used the website said that they had found all the information they wanted and a further 13% said they partly got what was needed. Fifteen percent had not found the information they wanted.

Opinion of the website was high. Professional staff valued it for its accuracy, authority and its ease of use. They relied on it as a source of information that could be used in evidence and as providing a general steer on rights and responsibilities. Individuals appreciated the scope of coverage, the clarity of language, its authority, the use of case studies and its convenience.

The relationship between the Helpline and the website was a close one, and most people used both sources for any substantial query. Clearly, speaking to a person was prized above all else, but some professional staff and individuals would visit the website first so that discussions with the Helpline would be more effective. Others went to the Helpline first and individuals in particular valued the assistance of Helpline staff in talking through to the right part of the website. The website was praised for its clarity but no website could match the personal nature of a call to the Helpline.

For more information see [The DRC website](#)

## **Recommendations**

Over the course of the survey various recommendations were made where interviews suggested improvements that could be made. Some of these were local in nature and did not have a wider application beyond the immediate organisation of the DRC Helpline. Others may be useful for other Helplines. The main recommendations are summarised below.

## **Publicity and dissemination**

The need to target information about the DRC and the Helpline continued to be high on our list of recommendations as the survey progressed.

Some thought needed to be given to ways of targeting information about the DRC and the Helpline so it reached the people who would find it useful and at the right time. An important source of information were organisations of and for disabled people although the interviews suggested that they did not systematically provide information about the Helpline. They needed to be informed and kept up to date about the Helpline. Employers and service providers suggested that information about the DRC should be systematically disseminated through their professional networks and through such means as conferences and seminars. The DRC was at that time focusing on providing assistance to smaller organisations and it was possible that larger concerns were less likely to receive information unless it was proactively delivered to them.

Mainstream and disability organisations needed to be kept up to date about DRC services and be provided with enough information to have a realistic idea of what could be practically provided. The DRC needed to ensure that likely key words and phrases (such as *disability rights*) used in web searches led internet users to the DRC. This needed to be done for the most popular search engines.

### *Briefing for individual callers*

Misconceptions about the DRC could lead to disappointment. Information about what the DRC was able to do in practical terms needed to be more widely disseminated. The DRC website acted as an ambassador for the Helpline and the DRC's other services. For many it was the first point of contact with the DRC. It was recommended that this should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it provided up front, clear information about what the Helpline was able to do.

Callers should be advised to contact the DRC early. Many problems were exacerbated because this was left too late.

The Helpline should try to identify callers who lacked the confidence to pursue their case and provide them with additional encouragement.

In 2004 we added that more thought needed to be put into how to target a wider range of people, including black and ethnic minorities who hardly featured at all in our sample. It was recommended that publicity was targeted at advisory organisations (both disability and non disability) that focused on these communities.

### **Standards of service**

The DRC was largely successful in empowering recipients of information. Without the DRC's encouragement and support many would not have begun to challenge the discrimination they had experienced. And without the supply of authoritative and reliable information from the Helpline they would not have pursued their case to completion.

### *Call backs*

The Helpline's record in dealing with calls promptly was impressive. However in a few cases this system slipped and calls were not returned quickly, or were not returned at all. The research underlined the importance of discussing a call back time, and ensuring that this is stuck to because any failure in this respect caused disproportionate discontent. A system of checking was needed to ensure that calls were returned. During the second year of the survey the DRC began to inform callers by post when they had made an unsuccessful attempt to call back. Later on the system of callbacks was replaced completely.

### *Delays*

A small minority of respondents were highly critical of the service because there had been problems of internal communication or unexplained delays, sometimes when intervention was needed at a critical time. This soured their relationship with the DRC. It was recommended that the Helpline appoint a trouble shooter who could arbitrate in such circumstances.

It was also recommended that the DRC should consider using a recording message to tell people when lines were less likely to be congested. Staff who answered the phone needed to be punctilious about warning callers when queues are likely to be long and giving an estimate of how long any wait was likely to be. Replies to emails need to be turned round quickly. Where information could not be

provided quickly an explanatory email should be sent to explain why this was.

### *Routing between advisors*

Helpline staff were ~~u~~iered to deal with different levels of query. A small number of callers with more complex cases found the process of being transferred between the tiers wearing. It was recommended that consideration should be given to finding a way of cutting down on the duplication of information demanded by each tier, and making it possible for callers to speak to the same Helpline worker each time they called. This problems was solved with the introduction of a computer system which allowed all salient information to be logged.

### *Call charges*

Callers paid for the cost of their calls at the prevailing local rate. While many would have preferred calls to be free, the majority accepted the need to charge. For many months each call was preceded by a recorded message about data protection. A few callers felt that this added unnecessary cost to their call, and became irritating if they called more than once. This messages was later dropped.

### *Fulfilling promises*

Practical help offered by the DRC was welcome, and clearly went beyond the expectations of some callers. In a very small number of cases the DRC failed to carry out what they had promised. This could have serious consequences for the caller. Some system for logging any action promised and checking on progress was needed.

### *Specific detail*

Publications were an invaluable part of the DRC's service and met the needs of the majority of callers. However some respondents expressed a need for more detailed information. Two typical categories of these were:

- more situation-specific case studies to help those respondents who found it difficult to apply the information provided to their own circumstances
- technical details where these were needed in order to make physical or other changes to what is being provided.

### *Further reference*

It was recommended that an indexed library of case studies or precedents was set up to clients interpret the law more accurately. The DRC referred callers to specialist organisations when technical details were required. This worked well. However a summary of such sources, with links when these were provided in electronic format, would have been useful, particularly for professional callers.

### **Paucity of affordable legal advice**

There was a consistent demand for legal advice from both individual and professional callers. Some expected the DRC to provide this and were disappointed when it did not materialise. Of course affordable legal advice is generally scarce, and this problem was not confined to disabled people. However we recorded that the unmet need for such support was a consistent theme of the research and the lack of it was a problem that many callers were unable to surmount, with serious consequences.

### **Views on the future of the Helpline**

In 2006 a sample of callers were asked for their opinions of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Few individual callers had heard of the CEHR at that time. Those who had heard of it realised that its remit went beyond disability but were sometimes vague about which additional groups it would represent. Some people mentioned race and religion while others said it would work for anyone who was discriminated against. Only a third of professional callers had heard of the CEHR and most had reservations about it,

All respondents were asked what the advantages or disadvantages of the CEHR might be for disabled people. Those who had not heard of it were given a brief explanation of its role. Respondents were able to enumerate more disadvantages than advantages; it is important to remember that at this stage these ideas were speculative since the CEHR had yet to come into being at the time of interview. Nevertheless they represent perceptions

*Advantages.* It was suggested were that access to diverse information would be easier because it would be in one place and so navigation between different discrimination issues would be easier.

It was also thought that a larger organisation would attract funding more easily, particularly from the Government. An organisation with a wider remit was expected to have more weight and authority which in turn would ensure a higher profile for disability issues. There was also a hope that the greater authority of the new body would enhance all services and lead to real change.

*Disadvantages.* Fears for the CEHR were that its helpline would be more remote and harder to use than the DRC Helpline. Some considered that the personal touch would disappear. Others said that existing expertise would be diluted both in terms of the detail available and in the difficulty of getting through to a knowledgeable person. Respondents tended to believe responsibilities would be spread too thinly and that resources may not be sufficient to support all the activities necessary for each area of discrimination. Underlying this was the belief that disability might altogether be given lower priority by the CEHR.

Some people thought a single body was inappropriate given the range of legislation in the area. Others feared that the volume of legislation would increase and impose obligations that small firms would not be able to afford

The most fundamental objections were that its breadth of responsibility of the CEHR would mean that the organisation would not be effective, and that its size would just lead to more bureaucracy.

Finally there was the danger that some disabled people would not identify with the CEHR since it would not be solely dedicated to disabled people, and therefore might be reluctant to contact it.

## Individual callers

### Sources of information about the DRC

It was important to know how people first came across the DRC, both as a measure of how well known it was becoming and as a guide to the best way of deploying publicity and promotional materials.

Individuals heard about the Helpline in a variety of ways, and the wide scatter of sources they mentioned early on in the survey suggested that this was largely by chance. A number described how they had been told about it casually or in passing. Over the time of the survey the main primary sources of information recalled by callers were:

Base:	1785
	%
Non disability organisation	36
Websites (apart from DRC)	16
Word of mouth	15
Already knew (eg through work)	9
Disability organisation	6
DRC publications	5
National or local press	5
DRC website	5
Phone books	4
Broadcast media	3
Other	3
Can't remember	5

These relative importance of these sources of information was remarkably stable throughout successive stages of the survey. The main exception was the growth in importance of the internet. In the first six months of the survey this was mentioned by about one

person in ten; by the end it was a source of information for nearly a third of respondents.

### *Disability and non-disability organisations*

When they had a problem people turned to the organisation they felt were most likely to help. It was therefore not surprising that the most commonly cited sources of information were *mainstream* organisations of one kind or another. These included jobcentres, ACAS, employers, Access to Work, local councils, solicitors and trade unions as well as advice and information agencies such as the CAB.

A large number of people would not have come across the DRC if the organisations they had approached for help had not volunteered information about it.

The fact that mainstream organisations were the main single source of information and that they were a very diverse group suggests that knowledge of the DRC had been widely disseminated (although we cannot tell from this survey how many organisations did not know about the DRC or failed to pass on information about it). It was also encouraging that information about the DRC was communicated at the point where it was needed. This was both appropriate and productive as the DRC's help was consequently invoked at the right time and with realistic expectations

Disability organisations, who might have been expected to refer a greater number of people to the DRC, played a comparatively minor role and, perhaps because disabled people heard about the DRC via the mainstream media first or because these organisations were themselves poorly informed about what the DRC could offer. Our interviews also suggested that people did not usually approach disability organisations in the first instance when they needed help with external events. This was a pity as disability organisations appeared to give timely and well-informed information about the DRC when they were contacted.

Recommendation:

- The DRC needed to ensure that organisations likely to be approached for help by disabled people were themselves kept informed and up to date on the DRC services and activities.

### *Word of mouth*

A substantial minority of people found out about the DRC from colleagues, family members or friends. The majority were left with only a very general impression of the DRC, often from a source they had forgotten. There was little the DRC could do to ensure the accuracy of information spread in this way, apart from maintaining high *general* levels of information and publicity until the DRC became as familiar a part of the landscape as CABx were.

### *The internet*

The internet was increasingly important as a source of information about the Helpline. A number of people found the DRC by carrying out general searches under likely but speculative headings. They simply assumed that an organisation must exist to help them, somewhere. Others had been given vague information about the DRC and used this as a starting point for tracking down more precise details. It was clear that these searches were an important source of information.

### Recommendations:

- the DRC should ensure that its website appeared early on in response to search criteria likely to be used (such as *disability discrimination*) on the most popular search engines
- the home page of the DRC website should describe what it does and flag up the helpline

### **Expectations and satisfaction**

Questions about satisfaction with key parts of the Helpline service were a core feature of the survey. Because satisfaction is closely related to expectation, each respondent was asked to recall what they had expected from the DRC before they had first contacted it.

### **Expectations**

Some people had very little information about the DRC and made assumptions based on what they had been told (from sometimes unreliable sources) or on what they had deduced from the DRC's name. Individual callers' expectations were also affected by such

things as their previous experiences of seeking help and attitudes to a source they regarded as official

However in most cases callers had a realistic idea of what services the Helpline could provide although many thought it would be able to provide practical help as well as information. Only a small number of callers (7%) said that they did not know what to expect from the DRC at all, and had just called on spec. Beyond these we distinguished four distinctive, although overlapping groups:

*Those who saw the DRC as an official agency*

Those who have been given the impression that the DRC was a government or legal agency saw it as having authority, and expected definitive information about the DDA and the law. Some believed that an official agency that was somehow for disabled people would provide direct personal help or advocacy.

This group of people had high expectations of the DRC and were disappointed when personal and practical help did not materialise. When this happened some were quick to typify the DRC as a whitewashing organisation rather than one of real substance.

Because it was perceived as an official organisation and as one with ultimate authority some callers felt that if the DRC could not help them no one would be able to. They had reached the end of the line. This accounted for the somewhat bitter attitude of those who had problems that lay outside the DRC's remit.

*Those with little idea of what the DRC did*

Some callers had only a vague and impressionistic idea about what the DRC could do. They remembered references to it in the media, but were vague about the details although they knew its interests were in disability. Media coverage prompted some of this group to seek out the DRC when it coincided with a personal issue; but more often media coverage just meant that people recognised the name of the DRC when they came across it from another source.

Some impressions of the DRC were determined by an interpretation of its name which suggested that information it provided would have legal status, and that it had a duty to protect disabled individuals' rights. Many people judged that it would be on the side of disabled people and some went on to assume that it would offer individual

practical help for this reason. In particular the use of the word rights created the impression that the DRC would represent disabled people. It would help change the law for us or be for people like me.

The combination of personal advocacy and political clout was seen as an unbeatable combination by some; this led to disappointment when the services provided fell short of personal support.

#### *Those who came across it on the internet*

Some respondents were not been aware of the DRC Helpline before they came across it on the internet. Generally this group of people were relatively well informed and had largely realistic ideas about what to expect, particularly when they had seen the DRC's own website before calling the Helpline. The web sites they had seen provided some context and some explanation. Most of this group were able to make an educated guess about what the DRC might do for them although some undervalued the assistance they would be able to get - they considered that the DRC would be able to offer advice only of a limited and simplistic kind.

#### Recommendations:

- Misconceptions about the DRC could lead to disappointment. As we have shown above many sources of information were informal and so uncontrollable. However information about what the DRC was able to do in practical terms needed to be widely disseminated.
- The DRC website acted as an ambassador for the Helpline and the DRC's other services. For many it was the first point of contact with the DRC. It should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it provided up front, clear information about what the Helpline was able to do.

#### **General levels of satisfaction**

The large majority of respondents were satisfied with all that the DRC provided. This was true of the ease of getting through to the Helpline, the quality of the advice received and of the final outcome. More details of all of these are given below.

Nearly four fifths of callers were satisfied with the speed with which the Helpline dealt with their calls.

### Q Satisfaction with speed of dealing with the query

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1790	160	199	180	173	150	153	160	81	161	1557	162	54
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	76	70	65	63	63	68	89	77	85	89	86	88	89
Dissatisfied	17	24	29	28	24	22	5	14	7	4	10	5	8
Neither	7	5	7	9	12	9	5	9	6	7	5	6	2
Don't know	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	2

Individual callers were highly satisfied with the quality of information they were given. Satisfaction levels were high from the beginning but reached 84% by the final months of the survey.

### Q Satisfaction with information provided

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1856	160	198	178	172	145	152	157	161	161	157	161	54
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	70	69	60	66	67	69	70	71	70	78	73	75	78
Dissatisfied	15	20	27	20	14	14	9	16	17	8	13	9	11
Neither	12	10	10	13	17	17	20	12	8	8	11	12	4
N/A/Don't know	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	1	5	6	3	4	8

The majority of cases had not reached an outcome by the time of the interview. Of those that had, nearly three fifths of all callers were satisfied with this outcome. Just over a quarter of the sample considered that it unsatisfactory; the remainder were neutral:

**Q How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the final outcome?**

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Individual callers	483	26	46	40	47	47	54	53	72	39	42	17
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	58	73	61	50	60	66	63	55	46	43	59	88
Neither	14	4	15	28	6	17	17	11	18	15	14	-
Dissatisfied	26	20	20	23	34	15	21	34	31	41	27	12
Don't know	1	4	4	-	-	2	-	-	6	-	-	-

Respondents who were seeking a confirmation that their grievance was justified and that they had a case worth pursuing found that the Helpline was able to give them exactly what they were looking for. Similarly those who were seeking information they needed for their case were usually provided with what they needed.

Callers who had very little idea of what the DRC could do for them sometimes tended to have rather jaundiced views about what might be provided (perhaps based on their previous experience of other organisations). These low expectations were often surpassed by the DRC.

Dissatisfaction mainly occurred in three circumstances:

- when callers believed that the DRC could help in areas that were outside of its remit. One particular example of this were callers who were members of a trade union who complained when the DRC advised them to work through the union. Callers often gave good reasons for not involving their union and felt aggrieved when the DRC explained that they could not help. Some of these callers had been told to contact the DRC by their union, so were caught between the two organisations
- cases which had reached the time limit for action also were a cause for complaint, particularly if the caller considered that the DRC had itself been slow to respond

- otherwise the main cause of contention was the lack of legal advice. There was a widespread demand for legal advice and information. One of the main problems for the DRC was that it was seen as a legal or quasi-legal organisation. Indeed some respondents saw it as being *responsible* for disability legislation or as having great influence over legislators. It was therefore understandable that a substantial number of callers expected the DRC to provide them with clear, detailed legal advice and low-level advocacy. (An analysis of the questions asked showed that over four fifths of all callers were seeking legal or quasi legal advice).

While the DRC provided clear information on the generality of the law this was often seen as falling short of what was needed for a complex case. Many of those wanting legal clarification felt let down because they had expected the kind of involvement that might be provided by a solicitor.

## The process

This part of the report examines the various component of a query and how it was dealt with by the Helpline.

### Call management

#### *Opening Hours*

Although most people did not know what the Helpline's opening hours were, most expected it to be open during office hours and into the early evening. There was little demand for extending hours beyond this, although those who saw the DRC as being somewhat similar to an emergency service wanted the phones to be staffed at weekends and into the late evening. From the start the Helpline had been open until 8pm and this an important advantage as many people had difficulty contacting the Helpline during working hours, particularly when they needed a confidential conversation.

#### *Awareness of methods of contact*

Most people guessed or assumed that the Helpline could be contacted by letter and email as well as by phone. Awareness of other means of communication open to Helpline users (computer disc, tape, braille and large print) was lower.

### *Phone or letter?*

Nine out of ten people contacted the Helpline by telephone, and nearly all of them preferred to communicate in this way. However just over half of all callers also wanted to have information confirmed in writing. This was because written information was thought to be easier to follow and was somehow felt to be more authoritative. It was of course also there for future reference and could be showed to other parties as part of a negotiation process.

### *Getting through by phone*

Only a small minority of individuals encountered any difficulty getting through to the Helpline.

Despite an unexpectedly high volume of calls received by the Helpline, complaints about getting through never reached a significant level. During the first six months the Helpline continued to have a high number of callers who got through to it at the first attempt (86%) without having to wait. A year later we reported that this had stabilised at over eighty percent, a level that was maintained with relatively minor fluctuations up to the end of our monitoring in April 2007. Where callers needed to be called back this was usually done promptly or at an agreed time and from mid 2005, 95% of call backs were made when promised.

Although the proportion of dissatisfied callers never reached a high level at any time during the period of the survey, the main causes of complaint remained consistent - slow responses and being unable to speak to the same Helpline worker when follow-up calls were necessary. Where callers did experience more than a single isolated difficulty, this was usually because they had been trying to contact the Helpline in a short time period, at times when it was busy.

### *Queuing*

The majority of people had to queue to speak to one of the more specialised advisors . just over a quarter (26%) got through straightaway. The average length of such queues was 17 minutes. Half waited for ten minutes or under. The majority of callers did not object to having to queue, providing this did not extend beyond about ten minutes. Very few people waited over 30 minutes before speaking to someone but delays of this length caused a great deal of antagonism. Callers were more likely to consider the wait

unjustified if the advisor did not provide the help anticipated . respondents were more tolerant of inconvenience if they got the information they needed.

It appeared that few people were warned of an impending wait. In some cases during the early stages of the survey the Helpline said they would call back when an advisor was free . this was very much appreciated.

#### *Dealt with in a single call?*

Early on a high proportion of calls were dealt with within a single phone call. This fluctuated during the period of the survey reflecting the nature of calls, levels of case work and other local factors. However following procedural changes made late in 2003 a higher number of queries were once again being dealt with in a single call; in the last two years of the survey this averaged at 83%.

#### *Recording details of the caller*

Callers did not object to their personal details being collected at the time of their first call. Where second tier advisors needed to go over the same details of the case, an explanation needed to be given to reduce the irritation this sometimes caused.

#### *Recommendations:*

- the DRC should consider using a recording message to tell people when lines were less likely to be congested.
- Dissatisfaction due to extended waits needed to be reduced. First tier advisors needed to be punctilious about warning callers when queues are likely to be long and giving an estimate of how long any wait was likely to be.

#### *Time taken to give information*

An issue for the management of any helpline is the average time allowed for individual calls. Unlike most helplines the DRC did not impose time limits on their advisors. Calls could take a long time to resolve. Slightly fewer than one in ten took five minutes or less. About half of all respondents reported that they had spend less than half an hour on the phone while a quarter said they had been on the phone for more than an hour

The overwhelming majority of respondents (over nine out of ten) considered that the advisor took enough time to fully understand their situation to deal with it appropriately. This was equally true in the early days of the Helpline as it was in its latter stages. Consistent with this, the survey found that callers were happy with the time taken to answer the query and the level of personal attention they received.

### *Approaches made too late*

Before calling the Helpline many individuals had tried to get help from other organisations. Sometimes the organisations approached first had been unable to provide any effective help and the case had been delayed without any progress being made. By the time they found out about the DRC Helpline, the situation had become urgent. In a few cases this had a detrimental effect on the case and the DRC was sometimes blamed because they could not achieve anything in the time left for action.

Satisfaction with the information provided by the DRC was often closely related to how far it could be used to resolve the case, which in turn depended on how early information was sought. Thus people who anticipated a problem on the horizon were more likely to be satisfied with the information obtained because they had time to use it, and could do so in some tranquillity because the situation had not yet become critical.

### ***Email and letter***

Unless callers requested otherwise, all emails sent to the Helpline received replies by email. The DRC used a template to ensure that replies gave comprehensive information, had appropriate disclaimers and included useful references. Each email was individually written rather than being assembled from standard paragraphs. In doing this advisors quoted relevant sections of the DDA where necessary, rather than sending entire publications.

By the end of the first eighteen months of the survey nearly one in ten queries made by individual were made by email or letter.

E-mails were generally answered fairly promptly - ten percent on the same day and over a third by the next day. A quarter were answered within 2-3 working days, while the rest took longer. However 18% of e-mailers said they had needed to prompt the DRC for a reply.

Nearly half of those who approached the DRC by letter received a reply within three working days; a quarter had had to wait more than 8 working days for an answer.

The relationship between queries submitted by email and those made by phone was examined in a qualitative report. Although the sample was small it did not appear that queries made by email were different to those made by telephone. And, like telephone callers, many email users contacted the Helpline only when their situation had become urgent.

The comparative advantages and disadvantages of information by telephone and information by email were well understood by respondents, and most chose the medium they used deliberately.

Replies to emails both served the dual purpose of providing answers to questions and providing a written record. Email was used by some because it was simply more convenient, and offered a degree of privacy not possible with the telephone. Others considered email to be a particularly disability-friendly medium. They liked being able to re-size and edit selected information to avoid trawling through long screeds on screen. Email allowed users to compose questions accurately and fully (some found this difficult by phone) and get a response in black and white. Some had chosen to use email because personal circumstances made it difficult to contact the Helpline by phone.

Those that preferred to use the telephone said that its main advantages were its immediacy (you can get an answer there and then) and the fact that it was easier to explain a problem directly to a person than try to describe it in writing. A very small number simply preferred to contact the Helpline by phone because their disability made writing difficult.

*Recommendation:*

- As we have already shown, many individual callers contacted the DRC late and at a time when they needed information urgently. This was also true of those who used emails. Replies to emails need to be turned round quickly. Where information could not be

provided quickly an explanatory email should be sent to explain why this was.

### Information provided by the Helpline

#### *Calibre of staff*

The success of the Helpline largely depended on the calibre and training of its staff. All Helpline staff received substantial training before they were allowed to answer calls. This investment paid off extremely well. With very few exceptions callers were very impressed by the approach and knowledge of the advisors they spoke to. It was clear that a great strength of the Helpline was that its staff took the time to listen to callers in some depth, and were expert enough to provide appropriate and definitive answers.

Throughout the six years of the survey very high levels of satisfaction were recorded, rarely slipping below 75% on any of the four measures used:

#### **Q Friendly or helpful**

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1854	158	198	175	172	145	153	160	160	161	156	162	54
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	93	95	93	91	91	94	93	90	90	97	97	95	95
Poor	3	5	4	6	2	4	-	3	5	2	1	4	6
Don't know	4	1	4	3	8	2	7	7	4	1	1	1	-

### Q Advisor clear and easy to understand

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1853	157	198	175	172	145	153	160	161	161	156	161	54
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	95	95	95	95	96	97	94	93	90	99	97	98	93
Poor	2	5	2	3	3	3	3	2	6	1	2	2	6
Don't know	2	1	3	2	1	1	4	6	4	1	1	1	2

### Q Knowledge of the DDA and the law

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1767	159	197	175	171	146	153	160	129	146	142	141	48
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	83	73	71	74	78	76	84	83	76	86	87	83	85
Poor	6	10	8	8	8	9	2	3	4	4	3	4	4
Don't know	11	16	21	18	13	14	14	14	19	9	10	13	11

### Q Knowledge of disability issues generally

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1691	159	196	175	172	144	153	160	1088	124	130	126	44
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	79	71	68	70	71	73	75	75	64	75	80	75	78
Poor	5	6	8	7	9	6	1	2	3	2	3	4	4
Don't know	15	23	24	22	20	22	24	23	32	23	17	22	19

This level of performance was apparent from the beginning. For example in the first six months large majorities consistently reported that Helpline staff took enough time to deal with their query (89%),

quickly grasped what the problem was (78%) and were fully conversant with the details by the end of the call (79%). No one said that they felt rushed or that it was difficult to get across the details of their case. The importance of this should not be underestimated, given that many call centres are renowned for their cursory and abrupt approach.

However not everyone was satisfied. An analysis of the reasons for their discontent showed that quality control slipped sometimes. However, as the tables above demonstrate, these instances were very few

- inadequate knowledge of the advisers, or answers which were considered to be too general or too superficial:
- criticisms of the adviser's attitude
- incorrect or incomplete information
- language used was too complicated
- lack of disability awareness, or empathy with disabled callers
- dissatisfaction where a case had been closed or because the caller was told that the DRC could not help
- lack of awareness of the problems caused by specific disabilities.

#### *Quality and quantity of information*

69% of individual callers said that they had received all the information they needed.

Those who were dissatisfied with the information they received were asked what else they would have liked to have been told. As might be expected, the most common complaint was that information had not been detailed enough. Over half of all those who claimed that they had not been given all the information they wanted gave this as the reason for their criticism (53% of those who were dissatisfied, equivalent to 18% of the total sample). This included people who had been passed on to a specialist organisation when they considered the DRC should have provided information directly and those who were given general advice rather than clear guidance

about how to proceed with their individual case. Given the complexity of some of the calls received this was a creditable level of performance. Often the level of information required was beyond what could have been provided without direct first hand involvement in the case or needed a decision that was not possible given the lack of precedent or case law.

### **Action taken**

In some cases callers were just seeking information, rather than advice on what action to take. Otherwise the Helpline outlined the steps the caller might take to resolve the issue, usually by outlining options. Details of relevant source of advice and information were provided where necessary. In some cases, particularly in the early days of the organisation, the DRC could offer direct help in some form.

### *Balance of help offered*

In 2007, respondents were asked what they thought of the balance between what they were asked to do and what the DRC provided for them. Around two thirds considered that the balance of effort was about right. About one person in three had wanted the DRC to provide more help than they did. There were various reasons for this. They included those who felt the information provided by the DRC was too general and was difficult to apply to the individual circumstances of the case. Others wanted direct practical intervention, often because they were convinced that this was more effective than acting alone.

### **Direct help provided by the DRC**

in the early days of the survey, and in some circumstances, the DRC Helpline offered to act on behalf of the caller or provided some form of practical help. The most common type of intervention provided at that time was referral to a DRC case worker. Offered to nearly three quarters of those who were promised help in the first six months of the survey (38% of all callers). Other forms of assistance included making contact with another organisation on the caller's behalf, provision (and help with) application forms and referral to a DRC legal advisor or other specialist.

Direct help of these types was offered less frequently as precedents were established by test cases and as the DRC's focus moved away from direct intervention in favour of empowering people to further their own cases. In 2004 we noted that referrals to case workers were made to less than one in ten callers. This continued to decline and ceased altogether when the casework service was discontinued altogether.

As the survey progressed an increasingly high number were told to come back to the Helpline if their problems continued or if they encountered further difficulties. Towards the end of the survey seven out of ten people remembered being given this reassurance. This was deeply appreciated since it removed any hesitation callers may have had about making repeated calls to the Helpline. It also helped convince them that the DRC existed to help them rather than just operate on a distant policy level.

As might be expected, satisfaction with any direct help offered were high, not least because this was usually over and above what they had expected to receive. Over eight out of ten of individual callers were satisfied with all that the Helpline promised to do:

### Q Satisfaction with what the DRC promised to do

Period:	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	1034	79	90	91	88	52	51	67	77	121	134	137	47
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	81	69	72	73	73	78	86	91	80	87	84	86	87
Dissatisfied	11	23	15	19	15	10	8	4	11	9	8	7	9
Neither	7	9	10	7	10	10	2	4	8	3	8	7	4
Don't know	1	-	2	1	1	2	4	-	1	1	1	1	-

Just over ten per cent were dissatisfied with what had been promised. They were asked to give reasons for their views. The main causes of criticism were:

- the time it took for the DRC to call back or keep in contact or failure to maintain contact

- a lack of follow up or a failure on the part of the DRC to maintain interest in the case
- the time the case took to resolve
- insufficient information provided about what the DRC was going to do
- failure to carry out what had been promised.

Changes in policy meant that in an increasing proportion of cases the DRC was unable to offer practical help. The reasons for this were nearly always explained by DRC staff.

In the first few months of the survey most respondents accepted the DRC's explanation as being reasonable. A year later, by which time practical help was being offered to fewer people, only about half considered that the DRC's stance was reasonable. This rose in subsequent phases of the survey and averaged at 56% from April 2005. Their objections included complaints about the narrowness of the DRC's remit, discontent about the fact that DRC caseworkers were too busy to take on the case, indignation that the case had not been referred to a case worker at all and criticisms of what was seen as a poor attitude on the part of the DRC.

### **Action callers were advised to take**

The DRC advised nearly half (46%) of individual callers to take further action themselves. Over half of this group were advised to talk the matter over with the other party. Just over a third (35%) were advised to contact another organisation for more information or more specialised guidance. Just over one person in six was advised to seek legal advice or help.

Almost everybody was clear about what they had been advised to do, and felt confident enough to proceed. Nearly three fifths (58%) said they were happy to take action for themselves.

Just over seven out of ten callers were happy with this advice.

## Q Satisfaction with what the DRC suggested you do yourself

Period:	All	8	9	10	11	12
Individual callers	561	118	153	125	127	38
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	71	68	68	66	76	89
Dissatisfied	18	21	17	20	15	8
Neither	9	9	9	12	9	3
N/A	2	2	5	-	-	-
Don't know	1	-	1	2	-	-

Those that considered that it had fallen short mainly wanted more directive guidance or for the DRC itself to have become more directly involved.

Almost two thirds (65%) of those who were dissatisfied wanted the DRC to be more directly involved and to take a proactive role. Rather than outlining alternative courses of action, many wanted the DRC to make a positive recommendations. Over a fifth (21%) wanted the DRC to take total responsibility for the case, without requiring any further action from the caller.

### *Action taken*

It was clear that callers took the DRC's advice seriously. In most cases the DRC's advice was followed to the letter. The more practical the information the more it was appreciated. For example, those who were advised to write a letter and were sent a template were very complementary about this.

Those who were advised to get in touch with an other organisation almost always went on to do so, and the organisations they had been pointed to by the DRC usually turned out to be helpful. The few that had not followed the DRC's advice had not done so because:

- they had no faith in the organisation recommended as they had used them before
- the process would be too expensive
- too much stress would be involved

- they had already contacted the organisation prior to ringing the DRC.

A small number were asked to follow the legal route or to employ a solicitor. This advice was not always followed because of fears about potential costs, and in these circumstances the DRC was criticised for not giving realistic advice.

Few admitted to being daunted by what they had been asked to do. In a handful of cases respondents reported that their disability could make things awkward to carry out and that the DRC did not always seem to be aware of these difficulties. This may of course have been because callers did not mention it at the time.

Most callers remembered being encouraged to re-contact the DRC if difficulties were encountered and this provided additional confidence and reassurance.

### **Self help packs**

Just over one in ten respondents remembered receiving a self pack. Although numbers were small, strengths of the pack included information on the law that was sufficiently detailed to be of practical use, the clarity of language and quality of presentation.

Self-help packs were looked at in detail early in 2004. At that time, fifty-three callers (47 individuals and 6 professionals) in our sample had been sent the *How do I make a Claim?* pack. Nearly all of them said the pack was very or fairly useful. 79% said it was easy to understand.

Over a third did not proceed with their claim and so had not needed to use the pack. The majority of those that did use it filled in the forms themselves; the others had help from friends, family and some professional advisors. Four people had used the questionnaire enclosed with the pack; all found it useful and three out of the four said it was easy to fill in.

Only nine callers had suggestions about how the pack could be improved. Five felt that the language was too technical in parts and should be simplified. Four criticised the format for being too glossy and hard to read. One person felt that the DRC should arrange for an adviser to be on hand to help with filling in the forms.

## Outcomes

We have interpreted outcomes to include the results of the case and any additional benefits such as an increase in confidence that followed the experience of taking it on.

### *Success rate*

For 17% of individual callers no further action was needed. Callers were just seeking information. The remaining cases fell into the following pattern:

All individuals whose case needed action:	974
	%
Other party contacted, nothing done yet	37
No action taken	20
Appropriate adjustments made / case won	17
Legal or further proceeding initiated	13
Other party contesting case	9
Felt happier/reassured	4
Case lost	2
Other	6

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Nearly two fifths of cases were in progress at the time of the interview. The caller had contacted another party and was waiting for some form of response. In another fifth of cases the caller had decided to take no action. Of the rest cases had either been won or legal proceedings initiated. Very few cases had been lost.

### *Satisfaction with outcome*

58% of callers whose cases had reached a conclusion were satisfied with its outcome.

**Q How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the final outcome?**

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Individual callers	483	26	46	40	47	47	54	53	72	39	42	17
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	58	73	61	50	60	66	63	55	46	43	59	88
Neither	14	4	15	28	6	17	17	11	18	15	14	-
Dissatisfied	26	20	20	23	34	15	21	34	31	41	27	12
Don't know	1	4	4	-	-	2	-	-	6	-	-	-

A qualitative investigation, based on 80 individual respondents interviewed from October to December 2005 provided more detail on outcomes. It looked more closely at finished and unfinished cases.

***Finished cases***

Finished cases fell into four categories:

*Fully resolved cases.* These accounted for about six completed cases in ten. Most callers said that they were satisfied both with the ultimate outcome and the level of assistance provided by the DRC. In the few remaining cases callers considered that the outcome fell short of their expectations and hopes. However, judging by this small sample, they did not blame the DRC for this shortfall.

*Cases that callers had abandoned.* These consisted of cases where the caller had expected the Helpline to take action on their behalf. When this did not transpire they became discouraged and let the case slide. These cases did not appear to be any more complex than those that had been successfully resolved . callers merely needed closer attention or more support than average.

*Cases that had run out of time.* A small number of cases remained unresolved because they had run out of time . legal action could no longer be taken. This was not due to any laxity by the DRC, but was

because callers had made contact too late.

*Cases that fell outside the DRC's remit.*

The majority of successfully resolved cases appeared to have characteristics in common:

*Relatively straightforward questions.* Many involved the provision of relatively simple information. Two thirds of callers whose cases were finished at the time of interviewing had contacted the Helpline with questions to which clear and unambiguous answers could be provided. Callers were mainly seeking simple clarification of aspects of the DDA, their rights and confirmation that they had a case. Information of this type was readily provided by the Helpline and the vast majority of callers did not need to go anywhere else for help.

*The need for reassurance.* Many individuals simply needed sufficient encouragement and reassurance to allow them to proceed with their query. Sometimes little actual information was required by the caller. What was important was the DRC's reassurance that the case was reasonable. This both encouraged callers to take their case forward and increased their confidence.

*Timing.* In practice most callers contacted the DRC in good time. Late contact could adversely affect the outcome of the case, preventing cases being resolved because they ran out of time. Even in cases that lay outside the remit of the DRC, early contact may have meant callers were more effectively signposted. A lot of time could be wasted identifying the appropriate organisation to contact.

Attempts should be made to identify callers who may be more dependent than others on external help, and offer them enhanced information and support. A check could be made by the Helpline to see if they were pursuing their case or had abandoned it.

***Unfinished cases***

Nearly three fifths of cases in our sample were unfinished at the time of interview. Few of these respondents considered that they could predict what the final outcome of the case might be.

Unfinished cases fell into three categories:

*Waiting on a second party*, either the other party to the dispute or an organisation recommended by the Helpline. In some cases the second party had not acknowledged the caller's communication at all. In others some response had been received, but had fallen short of what the caller wanted or expected. We could not tell at this stage if there would be any further developments or not.

*Legal proceedings underway*. In these cases some form of external assistance had been obtained, such as ACAS, a trade union or solicitor.

*Case stalled due to lack of advocacy*. This situation was similar to that of finished cases. Callers had become discouraged because they were seeking practical help and had done nothing since calling the Helpline. Some criticised the DRC for not appearing to appreciate the gravity of the case.

Some cases were protracted because they had been referred to the DRC late, sometimes after a number of other organisations had been contacted. In a few cases the DRC had been contacted when the caller had hit problems or been unable to make progress unaided. This could mean that the situation had become more complex and that the room for action had been reduced by the delay.

*Recommendations:*

- The DRC's remit be made clearer, with examples to illustrate what cases do and do not qualify under the DDA
- Callers be advised to contact the DRC early
- The Helpline should try to identify those callers who may lack the confidence to pursue their case and provide additional encouragement. Where resources are required the Helpline should check that these are available, and advise callers what to do if they are not.

## **Empowerment**

The DRC was largely successful in empowering recipients of information. Without the DRC's encouragement and support many would not have begun to challenge the discrimination they had experienced. And without the supply of authoritative and reliable information from the Helpline they would not have pursued their case to completion.

Many contacted the Helpline simply to discover if they had a valid case. Simple confirmation that they were in the right was sufficient encouragement for most. Others wanted additional guidance on what action to take. In the majority of cases they were seeking reassurance that the action they were embarking on was the right course to take, and that it would not rebound or have an adverse affect later. In most cases the Helpline was sufficiently reassuring on both of these counts.

About one in ten callers had expected more than this and were disappointed when more tangible support did not transpire. This was sometimes because they had misconceptions about the DRC's role and remit, but was more often because they believed more help was necessary to redress imbalances of one kind or another. This group often felt let down and undermined by the DRC. Many did not proceed with their case . in some cases it was the final blow, and discouraged people to a greater extent than might have been expected.

## **Employers and service providers**

Meeting the needs of employers and service providers was particularly important for the DRC, as it was hoped that contact with the Helpline would help raise general awareness of disability issues and correct negative attitudes about disability.

## **Sources of information about the DRC**

Most employers and service providers credited their knowledge of the Helpline to information received from other organisations, the internet, word-of-mouth referrals from their networks of contacts and from literature provided by the DRC itself. The October 2004 deadline for completion of the DDA no doubt increased the level of information provided by all these sources.

In the first few months of the survey over a quarter of professional callers said they had first heard of the DRC Helpline via the DRC's own literature or publications, which suggests that the distribution of promotional material was reasonably successful. As the survey progressed more people reported hearing about the DRC from non disability organisations. Disability organisations were not, and never had been, a significant source of information for them.

Over time the internet gradually increased in importance for professionals and became a primary source of information.

Although professional callers were well served by their own information sources and networks a number commented on the paucity of information about the Helpline and the DRC. This was despite successive waves of promotion carried out by the DRC as its services developed and different stages of the DDA were implemented.

## **Expectations and satisfaction**

Employers and service providers mostly contacted the Helpline to seek an answer to a specific question. This contrasted to individual callers who wanted a more general discussion and who often want to work through the details of the case. For this reason calls from employers and service providers tended to be shorter and more focused.

Employers and service providers were asked what they had expected of the DRC before they called for this first time. The majority . around three fifths . expected the DRC to be able to clarify details of any area covered by the DDA - access requirements, employment law and, later, education. They expected this advice to be quite specific and detailed. Another fifth had less ambitious expectations and anticipated that information from the DRC would be very general. Around a quarter of enquirers expected the DRC to be able to provide legal advice or information.

*How far were expectations met?*

Reasonably enough, professional callers wanted conclusive answers to their queries since the information would be used to make a change to policy, practice or in some cases a building. Opinions of the help provided largely depended on expectations and the nature of the information required.

Nearly three quarters of professional callers were happy with the information they received. The majority of these requests were for fairly basic information that the Helpline could provide as a matter of routine . indeed some were very positively impressed when the DRC provided more than was expected.

Those who were less satisfied wanted to have more prescriptive information than they were given. Sometimes they expected a more definitive ruling than the law or precedent made possible. Others wanted precise details appropriate to a particular case . for example the modifications needed to a building to suit a specific wheelchair user or the time that might reasonably be allowed to produce a specific document in braille.

## Q Satisfaction with information provided

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	791	60	97	118	125	47	46	40	60	59	60	59	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	73	78	74	69	83	66	65	48	72	75	70	83	70
Dissatisfied	15	17	14	15	11	17	20	26	18	14	12	7	15
Neither	10	5	7	10	6	15	15	23	7	10	12	9	10
N/A / Don't know	3	-	4	5	1	2	-	3	3	2	7	2	5

### *DRC policy changes on information*

The DRC changed its policy about information it would provide to larger organisations in December 2003. From that time these organisations were referred to the DRC website or to other sources rather than being given information directly. The fact that this change had been made was not widely known. Most employers and service providers continued to believe that the DRC offered information and advice to employers and service providers as freely as they did to disabled people. And, like many individuals, some continued to have the impression that the DRC would advise on any issue related to disability.

This change was reflected in the satisfaction recorded by the survey. Before the change an average of 70% of professional callers said that the Helpline had provided all the information they wanted. In 2004 this dropped to 59%. After this, and with fluctuations it rose again to 64%.

Many had approached the DRC on the understanding that it was a one-stop-shop and so were disappointed when they were referred on to other organisations. This was particularly apparent for information that the *caller* considered to be simple and which they felt could easily have been supplied by the DRC. Many were surprised to learn that the DRC did not offer the same level of service to professional callers as they did to individuals and were critical of this stance. Some said that, as a publicly funded body, the DRC should provide information to the business community as well as to individuals.

### *Recommendations*

- A proportion of professional callers were dissatisfied when questions they consider to be within the remit of the DRC were not answered. The DRC needed to take a view about how far these could be dealt with by, for example, targeted factsheets.
- While it was clearly impractical to keep all potential professional callers up to date with DRC policy, this could be signposted clearly on the website and provided to professional journals to reduce levels of disappointment caused by fruitless calls.

### *Perceptions of bias*

One early concern was that professional callers would consider that the DRC was an advocacy organisation for disabled people, and thus would not provide unbiased information to businesses.

This fear proved to be unfounded. Employers and service providers were asked what their views of the neutrality of the Helpline had been before they had called for the first time. Sizeable minorities had no firm views, which suggests that this was not a significant issue for most callers. Beyond this, the majority were convinced that information provided by the DRC would be both independent and reliable. While most thought the DRC would side with disabled people they also considered that it was part of the DRC's job to help businesses. In other words while it was recognised that the DRC existed to act on behalf of disabled people, this was not seen as having an effect on the quality or reliability of information provided to others.

Respondents were also asked to rate the advisor they spoke to for his or her understanding of the disability issues faced by employers or service providers. While a quarter of the sample could not make any comment on this because the nature of their conversations had not allowed them to make a judgement, the overwhelming majority of professional callers found that the DRC did have a grasp of business perspectives. This not only contributed to the credibility of the DRC but meant discussions were more productive.

## Q Knowledge of disability issues faced by employer

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	718	52	87	102	108	44	36	33	60	58	60	58	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	68	71	70	61	68	63	67	57	65	74	73	72	60
Poor	7	10	3	9	4	11	11	3	8	10	7	7	10
Don't know	25	19	26	30	28	25	22	39	27	16	20	21	30

### *Awareness raising*

Part of the DRC's mission was to increase awareness of disabled people's rights to ensure employers and service providers were familiar with their obligations under the DDA. All were asked if they felt contact with the Helpline had led to a better understanding of disability issues.

Excluding those who had too short a conversation to make a difference, over half (54%) felt that their contact with the DRC had improved their understanding; 12% said they had a good understanding already, and 36% said that their call to the DRC had not made any difference.

### **Call management**

Call management systems worked well for professional callers. Nearly all called within office hours and so found the Helpline's opening hours more than adequate. Nearly everyone got through without difficulty, even though they tended to call at times when the Helpline was at its busiest. Most were put through to an advisor within a reasonable time. Those who did have to wait for 20 minutes or more thought that this was unreasonable.

## Q Satisfaction with speed of dealing with query

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	772	60	100	120	126	48	47	41	31	59	60	60	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	77	76	82	71	69	59	81	58	87	90	87	93	90
Dissatisfied	18	22	16	27	26	40	10	32	6	7	5	2	-
Neither	4	-	2	3	5	2	9	10	-	3	7	5	10
Don't know	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	-

All callers considered that the questions asked by the frontline advisor were reasonable, and most assumed that this information was collected in order to direct them to the right advisor or department. The questions asked by the DRC compared very favourably to those asked by other organisations.

Professional callers were impressed with the calibre of staff on the Helpline, just as individual callers had been:

## Q Friendly/helpful tone

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	790	59	96	118	124	48	47	41	60	59	60	58	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	92	94	90	90	92	88	89	86	88	93	98	98	95
Poor	2	5	3	1	-	2	4	-	3	3	2	2	5
Don't know	6	2	7	8	8	10	6	15	8	3	-	-	-

## Q Advisor being clear and easy to understand

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	789	59	95	118	124	48	47	41	60	58	60	59	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good	95	93	94	94	98	100	93	83	92	98	100	98	90
Poor	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	7	5	2	-	2	10
Don't know	3	5	5	5	2	-	6	10	3	-	-	-	-

Unlike individual callers, most professional callers had looked at the DRC website before contacting the Helpline. Most of them chose to call as well because they wanted to know how to apply the law to their own situation or to confirm that they had understood the information correctly.

### *E mail queries*

Professional callers were more cynical about email than individuals. Many considered that there would be long delays before emails were answered or that the information would consist of a standard answer that would not have the detail required. Some respondents considered that they could elicit information by phone that would not be provided readily by email. It did not allow them to be forceful in a way that was possible on the phone. On the other hand some respondents considered that email had become a professional means of communication and was the medium they would use by default.

Some of their doubts about the speed of email were borne out in practice. On average professional staff received replies to their emails in within 4 to 5 days. However a small minority reported that replies took longer than this, and serious dissatisfaction was expressed when email enquires took a week or longer to arrive. Many had expected a 24 hour turn round.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Early in 2007 a small sample of employers and service providers were asked for their opinions of the reasonableness of the adjustments the law had required from them. Only eleven

employers or service providers had had queries which involved making changes to their buildings, policies or practices. Only one considered what they had been asked to do was unreasonable; the remainder intended to make the changes recommended without complaint.

However the term 'reasonable adjustment' was a source of uncertainty. A consistent complaint about the Helpline had been the fact that it could not make specific rulings on what adjustments might be considered reasonable because this was a matter for individual judgement or, ultimately, the courts. There was a tension between the need to get what one respondent called 'clear cut' advice and the difficulty of interpreting the general provisions of the law in the particular circumstances of the case. This problem may diminish as the number of precedents increases.

## Outcomes

Professional callers were asked if they were likely to introduce any improvements as a result of talking to the DRC. The majority of calls were requests for information or were of a nature where no further or immediate action was required.

In all, just under half of the calls in the sample of employers and service providers resulted in advice about making some change to policy or practice.

When provided with such advice nearly everybody (86%) had either implemented whatever had been recommended by the Helpline or said they intended to do so. Examples of these changes were improvements in access to premises, reviews of policies on employment, briefings for staff about their obligations under the DDA, changes to medical screening procedures, and the adoption of a new code of practice. Very few - under 2% - said that they did not intend to do anything. The remaining callers either did not consider that action was required or felt they needed further guidance about what steps to take next.

Over three quarters of professional callers were satisfied with this outcome:

## Q Satisfaction with outcome

	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Professional callers	252	11	18	23	33	12	14	17	42	-	31	35	16
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	78	82	78	60	79	92	78	71	74	-	81	88	75
Dissatisfied	10	9	-	17	12	-	21	12	12	-	6	-	19
Neither	12	9	11	22	9	8	-	18	14	-	13	9	6
Don't know	1	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-

## DRC compared to other Helplines

Our surveys of those that called the DRC Helpline showed a consistently high level of satisfaction and good performance on key measures of standards of performance.

Because the survey covered the DRC Helpline only there was no direct way of comparing its performance with other helplines. Over the course of the survey respondents provided anecdotal comments that suggested that the Helpline had avoided some of the characteristics that were disliked about other call centres.

However in 2004 the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) published the findings of a detailed survey of the problems experienced by those who had used a call centre in the last two years. The survey was based on the experiences of CAB advisors and on a MORI survey of a representative sample of members of the public. Although the methodology and the measures of satisfaction used by the CAB and Ricability surveys were very different, it was possible to provide some indicative information about how well the DRC Helpline compared to its commercial and public sector counterparts.

The CAB research found that the use of call centres was common throughout Great Britain; four in five of those interviewed by MORI had used one in the past twelve months. Perceived standards of individual call centres varied, but overall only around two in five callers were satisfied with the service they received. The chief complaints were prolonged periods of being left on hold, automated response systems and unhelpful staff.

Comparison with the Ricability survey of DRC Helpline clients showed overall that callers were more satisfied with the performance of the DRC Helpline than participants in the MORI survey were with the call centres they used. Details are given below, under the main causes of dissatisfaction.

### *Left waiting too long*

The most commonly experienced problem for CABx advisors was the length of time it took to get through to the call centre . criticised by 40% of bureau staff. Their report highlighted complaints from advisors who had to queue for 40 minutes or more. Consistent with this, the MORI survey also reported that 40% of individual callers

said that the most annoying feature of using a call centre was the difficulty of immediate contact.

Since June 2003 we have asked Helpline callers if they got through to an advisor straightaway or if they had to queue. Just over two thirds (67%) had to queue before reaching an advisor and on average callers waited 15 minutes or more. This suggests that the DRC Helpline shares the problem of excessive volume and indeed nearly half (47%) of those that had to wait thought the length of time they had to do so was unreasonable. Although the proportion of people who had to wait for an unreasonable time was less for DRC callers, it should also be borne in mind that waits can be more difficult for disabled people. The filtering system introduced later gave priority to queries from disabled people which reduced queuing.

#### *Complicated automated options*

A quarter of people in the MORI survey found automated menu systems annoying and ten per cent of people in the CABx survey also cited this as a problem. Often a restricted list of alternatives meant callers were at a loss to find a description that applied to them. The DRC Helpline avoided the use of automated phone systems altogether.

#### *No face-to-face contact*

In the MORI survey 18% of callers said that they had wanted to be able to speak to someone face to face. The DRC Helpline did not provide for face to face meetings, but it did offer a comprehensive range of other formats for information, particularly for those who found using the telephone difficult because of a disability. It may be that a high proportion of callers in the CAB sample said they would prefer a face to face meeting in order to avoid the poor service given by the call centre. And many wanted a face to face meeting because they needed to do something tangible with the service provider, such as making a claim for a benefit . a situation that did not apply to the DRC. This was therefore less of a problem for the DRC.

#### *Passed from department to department*

Nearly a fifth (17%) of respondents to the MORI survey found being passed from department to department the most annoying aspect of using a call centre. Nine per cent of CAB bureaux cited this as a

contributory factor for the worst rated services. DRC advisers dealt with the vast majority of calls directly so this complaint did not feature at all in our surveys.

#### *Left on hold*

In the MORI report, lengthy hold periods were rated overall as the most annoying aspect of using a call centre by just over half of the sample. This was not a problem for the DRC who aimed to deal with queries in a single phone call.

#### *Music played while on hold*

16% of people in the MORI survey complained about music being played while they were left on hold, an irritant echoed by the CABx reports. The DRC did not use recorded music.

#### *No information provided about possible duration of calls*

The MORI survey shows this was a problem for one in ten of call-centre users. A very small number of callers to the DRC Helpline made a similar complaint. There were plans to change the queuing system so that callers will know what number they are in the queue.

#### *Poor understanding and poor English*

Just under one in ten (9%) respondents to the MORI survey sometimes found it difficult to understand call centre staff, often because it was clear that the first language of these staff was not English. The DRC call centre was based in England and, as we have shown, provided advice that was clear and easy to understand.

#### *High costs of the phone call*

Some private companies were criticised by the CAB because they charged a premium rate for calls. The DRC Helpline charged all calls at the local rate.

#### ***Unfriendly or unhelpful staff***

Nearly a quarter (23%) of call centre users in the MORI survey described staff as unfriendly or unhelpful. In contrast nearly all (97%) of callers to the DRC deemed advisors to be easy to talk to and friendly.

## Publications

Note: our interviews were carried out with callers whose query warranted specialist advice from the Helpline's second tier advisors. Those who phoned the Helpline solely to ask for a publication were not part of our sample, and it is possible that this group had opinions that differed from those interviewed. Counts made by frontline staff indicate that the Helpline received nearly 1400 such requests for publications each month.

In the first six months of the survey we recorded that 64% of individual callers and 42% of professional enquirers had been sent DRC publications. Early on callers were sent a package of publications; this became more selective as the survey progressed.

Most callers did not phone for a publication but to discuss the detail of their situation with someone who was knowledgeable. Their opinions of the publications they were sent was largely determined by the outcome of this call, and the publications were valued as a very useful adjunct to it, often as confirmation of what had been said. It is possible that people who received publications independently of the support provided by the Helpline may have different opinions.

Callers preferred to receive publications after such a discussion than be sent them cold. This was because of the well established advantages of human contact, flexibility and the opportunity to go into very specific detail.

Only in a minority of cases were publications seen as being important because they provided *more* information or additional background to what had been provided during the call. The value of publications were largely seen in terms of the extent to which they backed up, confirmed or augmented discussions with advisors. Their importance and main merit was in providing a permanent reference to what had been discussed.

### *Use made of publications*

Individual callers made full use of the publications they had been sent. This worked in three ways:

- publications gave some people confidence to pursue their case. Seeing the law clearly expounded lent additional strength to what they had been told, and publications looked sufficiently authoritative to encourage callers to pursue their case
- they were kept for future reference, beyond the circumstances of the current case
- some callers used the publications directly as *an official document* which could be presented to an employer or service provider. Here the imprimatur of the DRC was invaluable as it was seen to confer both government authority and legal force.

### *Quality of publications*

The standard of DRC publications was thought to be high and they met the needs of the majority of callers. Publications were rated as being both easy to understand and useful by over four fifths of the sample; a high opinion that did not vary much during the lifetime of the survey,

However some callers express a need for more detailed information. The three most common requests were for

- more situation-specific case studies to help callers who found it difficult to apply the information provided in DRC publications to their own circumstances
- technical details for service providers who were about to make adjustments to their premises or services. It may be that this could be done by providing references to appropriate specialist organisations or by providing information directly on the DRC's web-site
- clearer language, less jargon (mentioned mainly by those with learning difficulties).

### *Style and format*

A uniform and standard layout was used for DRC publications, with specifications for text, heading and other styles. This both ensured that the DRC had a recognisable house style and that the accessibility of publications was consistent across all publications.

This design met with almost universal approval. Respondents singled out:

- the large type size and clear font. These were appreciated even by those without visual impairments
- clear navigation aids . contents page, clear headings with an obvious hierarchy and logical spacing
- use of colour
- plain English and avoidance of jargon.

Very few callers had any criticisms to make of the style and presentation of publications. Clearly DRC publications took considerable resources to produce. However this investment would appear to be a sound one as responses to them were almost universally favourable, and they were said to provide essential information in an authoritative and accessible form.

Few callers were aware that publications were available in different formats and languages.

#### *Suggestions for improvement*

Although the publications were generally well received, just under half (48%) of those who had received them had suggestions about how they could be improved. Suggestions tended to be very individual and were therefore difficult to aggregate. However, some threads emerged consistently frequently and are summarised below, although each was cited by less than 10% of those who had received a publication:

- ways of keeping people in touch and up to date about new publications, (e.g., a mailing list)
- more case law or case histories to illustrate points
- more appealing design for young people
- checklists of different actions possible and likely timetable
- booklets without staples (as they cause difficulties for those with dexterity impairments)

- using less glossy pages, and having finger tabs to find information easily
- a frequently asked questions section at the back.

#### *Received what promised*

From April 2003 callers were asked additional questions about whether they had received *all* the publications they had been promised and about the speed of delivery. Over half (59%) said they had been sent all that they had expected. Just over a fifth (22%) said they had not been told which titles to expect and 10% said they received publications they were not expecting.

#### *Paper vs electronic formats*

Both paper and electronic publications had their advocates. On balance, individual callers tended to prefer paper while professional callers tended to consider electronic media more convenient. It should be noted that both those who preferred paper publications and those who found the internet easier wanted to get information from an advisor in the first instance. Both paper and electronic information were seen as providing support for information that had been given in person, by voice.

Some respondents made a distinction about the *nature* of information they expected from the two formats. These people tended to define a *publication* in terms of its length . usually as a bound booklet. In contrast *information* appropriate to the internet was thought to be a collection of succinct facts and an indexing or routing system that helped find them.

Electronic media obviously did not suit those who did not have a computer or access to one. However even those with IT equipment found lengthy information difficult to read on a screen. Paper was more portable, easier to handle and could be read in more comfortable circumstances. Some considered paper publications with the DRC logo on the cover carried more authority than print outs from the internet or email . a significant advantage if they were to be used to convince the other party in a dispute. Computer information did not meet the needs of some disabled people, particularly if they had to travel to a library or other public access point.

The main advantages of information on the internet were that it was more likely to be considered up to date, the fact that a particular piece of information could be identified and retrieved quickly, and it was easier to store than paper copies.

Information on the internet was often seen as being more suited to answering specific queries, while descriptive text, discussions and background information were often thought to be more appropriate (and easier to read) on paper.

Individual callers used paper information in different ways. Apart from providing confirmation of information given by telephone, publications were variously read thoroughly, filed away for future reference and used to convince others of the law and its interpretation. Professional callers often passed printed publications to their colleagues or used them as part of the information they provided for clients.

#### *Using electronic information*

Electronic publications on the DRC website were approached differently to those in print. While those who used the internet as a primary source for information tended to be in search of particular facts, and were interested in locating these at speed, users of paper publications were more diverse:

- Some callers read at a leisurely pace and appreciated being able to absorb information at their own pace, and in more depth. These callers were less likely to have called the Helpline on an urgent matter and reported that they were in no hurry to get through the information. On the whole they were more likely to read a publication thoroughly, from cover to cover and took some pride in the depth of their knowledge.
- Those who had called the DRC with a specific question were most likely to skim through the pages to find the information that related to their query, in order to confirm what they had been told by the Helpline. They often made no further use for the publication after this.
- A few callers liked publications in paper simply because they provided an easily stored source for future reference. They could be shown to others and the fact that they were in covers which

identified them as being from the DRC gave them an authority that a print out of information from the web did not have.

## The DRC website

From February 2003 questions about the DRC website were included in the regular survey and a qualitative investigation was carried out in 2007. From the start we reported that the website was highly regarded, with the majority of callers seeing it as a useful addition to the Helpline service. Callers used it for a variety of reasons, including downloading publications, reading case histories, and finding contact details. Almost all found it easy to use.

Nearly three quarters of those who called the Helpline had also visited the website so the two services emerged as being complementary.

### *Awareness*

The survey found that awareness of the website was high among respondents who had internet access and that three quarters of them had visited the site at some time.

Callers had come across the website in a variety of ways but the main sources of information were search engines, DRC publications and Helpline staff themselves. The qualitative investigation showed that searches were mostly carried out by Google, using likely phrases such as 'disability rights' or DDA. Comparatively few people in the sample had come across the website by following links from other organisations.

### *Usage*

Use of the website was pragmatic. Employers and service providers used it only when they needed to, so their frequency of use depended very much on their job and responsibilities. Individuals used the site less frequently and the number of times they visited it depended on the progress of their case. In both groups only a small number of people kept in regular contact with the website to keep up to date or from general interest.

Callers were looking for various types of information on the site. The two most commonly cited were details about how to contact the Helpline or the DRC, and clarification of the law on specific issues. Otherwise people were looking for information on the range of issues covered by the DRC, including rights, education, access and employment.

Just over nine out of ten of those who had visited the site found it very or fairly easy to use. Just over three fifths of those who used the website said that they had found all the information they wanted and a further 13% said they partly got what was needed. Fifteen percent had not found the information they wanted. Those that considered the information to be insufficient complained that:

- it lacked sufficient detail or was not specific enough
- It needed more details or case studies about employment law
- navigation was difficult, and some users were not sure whether the information they wanted was there or not
- it needed more up to date information on new legislation and regulations
- some publications on the site could not be downloaded or ordered
- descriptions of the services the DRC could provide were not always clear

#### *Opinion of the website*

Opinion of the website was high. Professional staff valued it for its accuracy, authority and its ease of use. They relied on it as a source of information that could be used in evidence and as providing a general steer on rights and responsibilities. Individuals appreciated the scope of coverage, the clarity of language, its authority, the use of case studies and its convenience. Criticisms were few, but both groups identified the difficulty of applying the general principles it described to particular cases. Some professional users thought its general ethos was slanted towards disabled people rather than being neutral.

The quality of information was perceived to be high. With exceptions, the majority (both disabled people and professional staff) felt the information was directed at the right level to people like themselves. The test of quality appeared to be if the site provided sufficient information to allow the caller to decide what to do next. Where it failed this test, the information was criticised . expressed

as not being action orientated. One particular grey area was that of reasonable adjustment which was a concept some respondents found particularly hard to apply to their own case, and was an area where the website was not particularly helpful.

#### *Relationship between the Helpline and the website*

The relationship between the Helpline and the website was a close one, and most people used both sources for any substantial query. Clearly, speaking to a person was prized above all else, but some professional staff and individuals would visit the website first so that discussions with the Helpline would be more effective. Others went to the Helpline first and individuals in particular valued the assistance of Helpline staff in talking through to the right part of the website. The website was praised for its clarity but no website could match the personal nature of a call to the Helpline.

#### *Advantages of website over print*

As might be expected respondents were quick to outline the advantages the website had over printed materials. Searchable data, more up to date information, the ability to copy and paste key facts were all given as examples. However significant minorities of both professional staff and individual callers retained a preference for booklets. They liked their tangible nature, found them easier to handle and more amenable for carrying around, distribution and filing. Some said DRC booklets were easier to navigate than the website. They were a particular boon to those individuals who did not have a printer.

#### *Authority*

Most people trusted all information that came from the DRC, whatever the medium used. Beyond this, some professional staff had more trust in the web because it included original sources and they thought it likely that it would have gone through more checks and was not prone to misinterpretation in the way information from the Helpline might. However some people, and individual callers in particular, considered that the Helpline had more authority because staff could be questioned to provide clarity on a particular point, and because of the additional background obtained in the course of a conversation.

### *Navigation*

Few people reported problems navigating the DRC website. Some professionals would have liked a more comprehensive list of headings, but many used the search facility to overcome this. The language was commended as being clear and jargon-free (some people would have liked to have plain English translations of the source materials on the site). Those that had noticed that font size and colours could be changed appreciated this feature. Some visually impaired people who would have found it useful had not noticed this facility . some way needed to be found of making this more obvious.

### *FAQs*

At the time of the qualitative interviews, few people had noticed the FAQ section of the website. Professionals staff and some individuals tended to be rather dismissive of them since they tended not to cover the information being sought. The few who hit on a relevant FAQ found it very useful.

### *Non users of the website*

Among individuals one group just avoided using computers and were unlikely to change this entrenched attitude. Others did not have access to a computer and some found had impairments that made using them difficult. Others said that they would have visited the website if they had heard of it .

Nearly all professional staff had used the website. In the qualitative interviews only three out of a sample of 80 had never heard of it. Another three were aware of it but did not use it because the Helpline had provided all the information they needed or had been unable to help . which led them to believe that they would not find additional information on the web either.