

BITE SIZE LEARNING SESSION

The story of the Citizens Advice service the 1960s to yesterday

1960-1980 – a time
of change

Turn of the 20th
century

Looking to the future

If you are new to any organisation, you don't know how and why it came about. The Citizens Advice service is nearly three quarters of a century old and has a fascinating history which we have tried to capture in this bite size session. The first bite size session covers the 1930s and 40s – the foundation years. In this bite size we look at a period of development and growth of the service, as well as glimpsing the future. We hope you enjoy it.

1960s-1980s – A time of change

The growth of advice services to the public

During the 70's and 80's the number of advice centres and bureaux grew dramatically resulting in a steady increase in the number of enquirers

On the back of consumer legislation, the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection significantly increased central government funding.

New kinds of problem

Although bureaux varied, there were a number of changes to the main enquiries. Here are some examples of the changes:

- In 1960, bureaux dealt with 50,000 enquiries about consumer issues, about 8% of all enquiries. In 1963, the government invited CABx to play a large part of the new programme of consumer education and advice.
- The 1988 reforms of social security legislation had clients queuing out of the door at every bureau. Impromptu training sessions for clients were held in the waiting room and calculation sheets were used to make it easier and quicker for clients to be advised.

- In the 1970s, bureaux had to deal with many workplace closures, resulting in large scale redundancies. Bureaux were able to provide advice on employment issues, but equally important would deal with housing and benefit issues.
- In the 1970s, major reforms of Housing legislation bringing in a huge growth in the Housing Association sector.
- In the 1970s and 80s, a rapid increase in the number of immigration enquiries from the Indian sub continent, often with clients not being fluent in English.
- In the 1980s, debt becomes the biggest enquiry (taking over from benefits), with bureaux often feeling overwhelmed by the number of enquiries.

To quote a volunteer adviser who worked in a bureau during this time:

"Life seemed simpler for the bureau workers 24 years ago, in that they were not required to pick their way through a maze of overlapping welfare benefits or tackle the complex task of assessing the eligibility for housing benefit.

Yet one senses the same concern and care for the individual and willingness to tackle any problem which we hope clients find in bureaux today."



A CAB in a portacabin, quite a common sight in the 1960s.

CAB involvement in emergencies

- In 1963 the collapse of the Cooperative Bank in Lancashire brought CABx all over the County to co-ordinate assistance.
- In 1967, the collapsing tip at Aberfan which cause the death of a large number of children resulted in a compensation scheme with local bureaux helping survivors deal with the valuers.
- 1968 saw more floods in Kent, London requiring CAB help with advice afterwards.
- The 1969 riots in Belfast meant that many were homeless and the CAB had to deal with 7500 enquiries.
- In 1972 Idi Amin expelled all the Asian population most of who came to the UK (12000 at Stansted alone). Bureaux were set up in airports with interpreters on hand to help the traumatised people.
- In 1984-5 the miner's strike caused untold hardship for parts of the coalfield areas. Mobile bureaux travelled through pit villages, giving advice mainly on benefits and housing.

How the service developed

The Citizens Advice service became independent in 1972. Before then, the national organisation was part of NCSS (National Council of Social Services) and most bureaux were run by the local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service).



A bureau in the early 1960s

Independence led to three associations being formed: England and Wales; Scotland and Northern Ireland. It also meant that the service was able to plan more strategically, with government increasing the level of the development grant to do this.

One effect of this was an increase in the number of bureaux from 615 in 1973 to 818 in 1979, with enquiries rising from 1.9 million to 3.3 million.

The increased grant helped the service to bring in two of the most important services to bureaux:

- The first categorised information system
- A centrally co-ordinated training programme for new advisers

One hiccup in the process was the Gerald Vaughan affair (as it was known).

He was a consumer minister and prompted by a complaint by an adviser, he launched an attack on the service, questioning the quality of advice, its efficiency and alleged political activities.

The resulting Lovelock enquiry resulted in a pretty glowing report and suggested that government should increase the grant to the service.

Dr Vaughan disappeared from view in the next government reshuffle,

Looking at the way that the service was being delivered

Despite the growth in enquiries, it was recognised that many groups of people still did not have access to advice services. Several reports were published that identified gaps in the service, for example:

- Geographical gaps

Some Local Councils did not fund advice centres adequately (or at all) so there were many areas where little or no service was provided. The government development grant provided an incentive to local councils to have a CAB in their town

- Disabled clients

It was recognised that many bureaux were not accessible to some disabled clients (or advisers) as many were on the first floor. During this period a concerted campaign resulted in a large number of bureaux moved to accessible (and incidentally more visible) premises.

There were also a number of initiatives to see how the service could both advise clients and use advisers who were blind or deaf.

- People in rural areas

Geography and economics meant that people from rural areas were still badly served. This was highlighted by the Northumberland Rural Bureau Project which experimented with different ways of getting the service to remote rural areas.



The first purpose built mobile CAB based in Braintree, Essex.

- Clients from black and minority ethnic communities

There was an increasing understanding that bureaux needed to be aware of who is using them and who was not. Many bureaux in multi racial areas mainly served white clients and had no staff who could speak other languages common in the local community.

The 1984 Kirklees Report identified a programme of changes which the service implemented over a 10 year period (and still continues to do so).

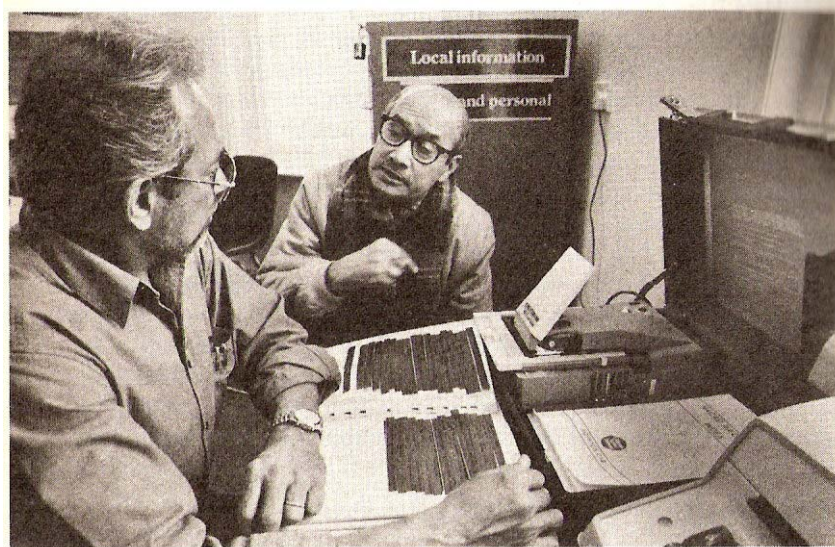
- Outreach and home visits

The 70s and 80s saw a great deal of experimenting with taking the service out to the community instead of waiting for them to come to the bureau. Some examples include outreach at:

housing estates
hospitals, mental health institutions and doctor's surgeries
prisons and courts
factories and other workplaces

Home visiting services were developed for elderly and disabled clients.

Outreach sessions and home visits were greatly helped by the development of a microfiche system which allowed an adviser to take the whole information system to the client – unimaginable at the time. However, it didn't last long as the computer arrived.



Using the microfiche at a bureau extension

New specialist services

The mid 1970s saw the start of the growth of casework services in consumer, debt, benefits and employment. These often involved representation at tribunals. The Specialist support Unit in Wolverhampton started out in 1976 to help develop and support bureau initiatives..

Nearly all bureaux have now developed specialisms to some extent. Here are some examples:

- Tribunal representation is now fairly common both at Social Security and Industrial Tribunals.
- In the 1980's the main growth area was money advice (debt) and welfare benefits.
- Other casework services developed include immigration, nationality, mental health appeals, housing, employment, and disability.

New technology

In 1982 the government funded the Prestel project to provide computerised advice which the service joined. Although this and other early computer projects were not a total success, it was recognised that information technology was going to be the way forward for the service.



An adviser working with the Prestel system

Since this first initiative, (new technology is now called information technology) the service has developed three generations of information system, AdviserNet being the latest.

The four other major innovations have been:

- Adviceguide – the public information website
- CASE - the electronic case recording system
- BMIS – a system for providing management information
- CABlink – a bureau network providing a platform for information exchange on all aspects of the service (see training below)

A new type of adviser

Probably the most significant change is the range of people who now work in the bureau.

In the 1970s, there was a recognition that advisers tended to come from limited backgrounds and bureaux should aim for a greater cross section of people as advisers and workers - age, background, race and gender.

As one CAB organiser put it:

"From a cosy ethnocentric group of people, the service has opened to more (inevitably) uncomfortable multi cultural forces with all the difficulties as well as potential rewards. I'm certainly conscious of the uneasy and tentative stances of colleagues during the transition, but I am also aware of the wholeheartedness with which many embrace the changes, however difficult."

Government employment schemes in the 70s and 80s introduced a much younger group of people albeit for a short period. These people were a great impetus for change and many stayed on as volunteer advisers and some became casework and managers.

Alongside the increasing diversity of advisers, the greater complexity of enquiries prompted a debate about the 'professionalisation' of the adviser's role. The development of competences in the 1980s, crystallised this debate and although they were agreed, the debate still goes on today.

New ways of learning

The Citizens Advice training service effectively came into being in 1974, bringing in a national training programme for new advisers. Before this period there was some guidance to bureaux about training advisers, but no national agreed training programme.

As resources became available, the training service introduced courses and packs to provide in service training for generalist advisers. In the late 1980s a management development programme was started and training was provided for managers and support staff.

At the end of this period, competence based learning was introduced allowing for external accreditation of CAB training and qualifications.

In the public and voluntary sector CAB training has a reputation for being very high quality, producing advisers that other organisations can 'poach'.

The growth of social policy

As the service has grown, successive governments have recognised our ability to monitor how laws and regulations are working. Although Policy Comment has always been part of the service, in the last two decades information retrieval and policy comment has had a very high profile. The service has produced a series of reports to influence government policy in three main ways:

- identifying the need for legislation or regulation
- putting forward proposals prior to government legislation
- commenting on problems post legislation

Of course, social policy also happens at the local level with bureaux influencing the practices of local councils and other institutions.

Overseas

In the post war tradition of helping with overseas issues, CABx were set up in South African townships, Australian cities, in many Caribbean and African countries, Israel and India.



Bulawayo CAB (Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia)

In 1961 South Africa decided to leave the commonwealth which brought a crop of enquiries from South Africans settled in the UK and British citizens enquiring about coming back to the UK.

There are now regular exchange visits to advice agencies in many countries across the world.

The 21st Century

The introduction of technology in the service is making this period one of rapid change:

CABlink, the CAB Intranet

In March 2002, CABlink was launched. For the first time all bureaux and Citizens Advice were connected on line. In the first 4 years, the service has been able to use CABlink to set up networks of communication and provide a wealth of information to bureaux.

The CABlink training site

The launch of the training site in 2005 opens the way to the development of e-learning and on line learning, allowing advisers and other bureau staff access to training from home and the bureau.

The beginning of email advice

Email advice is in its infancy with some bureaux offering an experimental service. One exception is the City bureau (covering the business district of London) which for several years has received a large number of enquiries by email from people working in the district.

The growth of telephone advice

For some time this was seen as a second class service to face to face, but now, many bureaux have launched new telephone services, some using Q call to share the service between several bureaux.

EIS and AdviserNet

EIS (Electronic Information System) converted the paper system on to a computer screen, avoiding the lengthy monthly updating process. In 2005 AdviserNet was launched, moving information on to the internet .

Advice Guide

Advice guide (www.adviceguide.org.uk) gives the general public direct access to CAB information. By the end of 2005 Advice Guide had been visited by 2,400,000 enquirers.

Looking to the future

What do you think may happen in the next 20 years?

To see some guesses (and some are quite wild!), click on the answer button.

To the kinds of enquiry area

[Possible
answer](#)

To the way we deliver the service

[Possible
answer](#)

To the way we organise the service

[Possible
answer](#)

To who will become CAB advisers

[Possible
answer](#)

To the way we help people learn to become advisers

[Possible
answer](#)

Where to find out more

Talk to a person who has worked in your bureau for a long time about how the bureau/service has changed.

See if your bureau has copies of Occasional Papers (ask a manager or guidance tutor if they have copies). Two interesting ones are on Rural Advice and Information and the Kirklees Report which was a critical study of how the Citizens Advice service related to black communities.

The information for this bite size mainly comes from two books, both out of print, but second hand copies are available through Amazon:

- The story of the Citizens Advice Bureaux published in 1964.
- Inform, Advise and Support published in 1989.

Some last thoughts

The history of the Citizens Advice service has a number of common themes and debates, which are still live issues today, for example:

- The position of volunteers in the service. How much can we ask them to do? What involvement in decision making should they have?
- Bureaux are always coming up with new ideas, for example, different ways of delivering the service, different ways of supporting advisers
- On the one hand, bureaux are financially supported by government, on the other, the service is frequently critical of government policy through its social policy work. A continuing potential conflict?
- Are bureaux leading the service or is it being led from the centre?

Any comments about Bite size sessions?

Bite size is a new way of learning, so we would like feedback on what you think of this session or bite size in general.

Click on [feedback](#) and it will raise an email for you to send.

Many thanks.

Don't forget to add this bite-size learning to your training record.

Some suggestions for the future

What may happen to the kinds of enquiry area in the next 20 years?

- Problems resulting from climate change
- Water shortages
- Problems with on line trading
- A greater number of problems about the care of older people
- Identity thefts
- Your guesses

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What may happen to the way we deliver the service in the next 20 years?

The access strategy, published in 2006 has identified issues about how many people find it difficult to access the service. Proposed ideas (all exist in the service already) include:

- The introduction of 'gateway' systems to direct clients to the right kind of service
- Information kiosks in the waiting room to give clients instant access to information
- Telephone call centres

To be a little more speculative:

- Interviewing over Video screens
- Expert systems to help clients self diagnose
- Smaller satellite bureaux based in adviser's homes
- Bureaux in supermarkets
- Peripatetic advisers using a number of agreed locations
- Your guesses

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What may happen to the way we organise the service in the next 20 years?

- A single County bureau with many outlets
- Computer voting on service issues
- All meetings replaced by video conferencing
- Annual prizes for the best adviser
- Advisers working from home
- Your guesses

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What may happen to the way we help people learn to become advisers?

Here are some of our guesses:

- Virtual classrooms
- Learning sessions on DVD
- Pod-casts
- CAB digital radio station
- Open University courses
- Brain implants!
- Your guesses

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Who may become CAB advisers in the next 20 years?

- The rise in the number of people over retirement age may mean an increase in number of older people in CAB as advisers
- Technology enabling more disabled people to become advisers
- All advisers may be required to have recognised qualifications
- Your guesses

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