

Thesis
4272

**According to need? The implementation of discretionary
payments within social assistance schemes in Britain and the
Netherlands**

Jacqueline Davidson

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Applied Social Science
University of Stirling
2004**

~~Oldos~~

Declaration

I declare that none of the work contained within this thesis has been submitted for any other degree at any other university. The contents found herein have been composed by the candidate, Jacqueline Davidson.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Jochen Clasen and Angus Erskine for their excellent supervision of this thesis. It has been a privilege to work with such fine scholars. Their support, guidance and advice have enriched my work and my understanding of a critical social science.

This thesis would not have taken the particular form that it did without the participation of the discretionary decision-makers in both countries. I would like to thank them for sharing their thoughts, time and detailed knowledge of their respective systems with me.

A number of people in the Netherlands made this cross-national enterprise both logistically easier than it would have been and extremely enjoyable. Thanks to Wim van Oorschot for all his help and hospitality. Thanks also to Tamara for her assistance with translating the vignette scenarios into Dutch. Special thanks go to Richard, Dirk and Gideon. Their kindness and friendship has been, and is, much valued.

Thanks also to all those in the Department who offered their support and encouragement at just the right times, especially Sharon, Rhoda, Ruth, and Nic, also Mary, Sam, Ian, Gill, Petra and all post-graduate students.

Thanks also to family and friends for all manner of support for, and distraction from, this undertaking over the years.

Abstract

This in-depth cross-national case study questions broad assertions made to date regarding the general similarities that can be found in exceptional need systems within social assistance schemes in Britain (the Social Fund) and the Netherlands (*Bijzondere Bijstand*). Based on qualitative documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with those who administer discretionary payments in both countries the research highlights that these nominally similar schemes serve diverse goals and aims in their national contexts. Reflecting the different traditions of cash and care and the administrative structure of the state in the implementation of policy in this area, the first part of the thesis demonstrates that *Bijzondere Bijstand* in the Netherlands is firmly situated in an 'activity fare' context whilst the Social Fund remains largely separate from the administration of 'welfare to work' in Britain. The second part of the thesis highlights the empirically observed diversity that follows from these configurations of social assistance. Those who administer these payments have quite different educational and occupational backgrounds that inform the ways they think about poverty and the poor and are related to what they try to do for clients and customers with discretionary payments. The Dutch 'paternalistic' administrator attempts to facilitate paths out of social assistance for clients whilst Social Fund Officers are concerned with 'managerially' processing a large number of applicants in the context of targets and budgets. Organisational contexts are shown to affect the administration of discretionary payments to the 'deserving and undeserving poor', but not the meanings that administrators imbue the forms of payment at their disposal, grants and loans. Configurations of social assistance essentially set the context for the degree to which administrators can award payments in accordance with absolute and relative notions of poverty and human need and the interpretation and construction of needs and wants. In practice, need is a dynamic social construct that is informed by the professionalism of the workers, the ideology of the programme they implement and the structure and constraints of the bureaucracy in which they work.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Contextualising discretion: welfare states, configurations of social assistance and perceptions of human need	12
Comparative welfare state research	12
<i>Worlds of welfare capitalism</i>	14
<i>Liberal regime</i>	17
<i>Social democratic regime</i>	18
<i>Conservative regime</i>	19
<i>Britain and the Netherlands: distinct regimes?</i>	21
Social assistance: the last resort	26
<i>Typologies of social assistance</i>	28
<i>Minimum income: relatively speaking</i>	30
<i>'Workfare'</i>	33
People processing or people changing?	40
Organisational theory and the implementation of social policy	42
Professionals or bureaucrats?	50
Discretion	52
Perceptions of poverty	55
The deserving and the undeserving poor	57
Need	62
Conclusion	65
Chapter 3 Policy context	68
Defining exceptional need payments	70
Origins: journeys to the last resort of social assistance	72
From the Poor Law to social assistance: Britain	74
From the Poor Law to social assistance: the Netherlands	78
Development of schemes: from discretion to standardisation	81
<i>Britain: towards entitlement</i>	82
<i>The Netherlands: discretion within standardisation</i>	88
Returning to discretion in Britain and the Netherlands: 'New Managerialism' and 'managed Liberalisation'	91
<i>The Social Fund</i>	91
<i>Managerialism and the 'Next Steps'</i>	95
<i>Managed liberalisation: Dutch Decentralisation</i>	97

Policy aims and organisational structures	105
<i>Britain</i>	106
<i>The Netherlands</i>	110
Professionals or bureaucrats? The nature of the personnel responsible for implementation	120
Conclusion	121
Chapter 4 ‘Going Dutch’: the methodology of doing comparative case-study research	124
<i>Methodological approach</i>	124
<i>Methods</i>	127
<i>Choice of countries</i>	128
<i>Accessing documents</i>	130
<i>Sampling</i>	133
<i>Accessing local and municipal offices</i>	134
- <i>The Netherlands</i>	135
- <i>Britain</i>	136
<i>In-depth semi-structured interviews</i>	139
<i>‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’</i>	142
<i>Vignettes</i>	146
<i>Analysis</i>	151
<i>Validity</i>	155
<i>Generaliseability</i>	155
Conclusion	156
Chapter 5 Administrative routes to employment	158
Motivations to employment	159
<i>Recruitment</i>	159
<i>Choice or chance?</i>	162
<i>Training</i>	169
<i>‘I don’t tell people where I work’</i>	174
Conclusion	178

Chapter 6 Organisational contexts: administrative concerns, methods and constraints	180
‘Helping people’	181
<i>Last resort: safety net or trampoline?</i>	182
<i>The Netherlands: ‘Trying to get the client to’</i>	183
<i>Britain: ‘Checking applications’</i>	195
Separating the deserving from the undeserving poor: administrative means and methods	205
Conclusion	217
Chapter 7 The administration of loans and grants: controlling budgets and behaviour	221
‘The right money to the right people’	221
‘They don’t have to pay it back’: awarding payment as a grant	223
<i>‘I think it will be a gift’: the Netherlands’</i>	224
<i>‘Think about the budget’: grants in Britain</i>	232
‘They have to pay it back’: the administration of loans	241
<i>Loans in the Netherlands: chastisement</i>	242
<i>Loans in Britain: enforcing less eligibility</i>	246
Conclusion	253
Chapter 8 Social assistance beneficiaries can’t be choosers: administrative notions of needs and wants	256
‘They must live within their means’	258
Perceptions of absolute and relative need	263
<i>Britain: ‘it’s dreadful when you think about it’</i>	263
<i>The Netherlands: ‘why does he need a suit?’</i>	266
Constructing needs and wants	270
‘If you haven’t got the money you can’t have it’	272
‘You’ve choose this’	274
Conclusion	280
Chapter 9 Summary and conclusions	283
Bibliography	294
Appendix 1: Participants’ job description and gender	
Appendix 2: Interview schedule	
Appendix 3: Vignette scenarios	

Chapter 1 Introduction

Ignatieff (1984:34) writes that ‘the claim of need’ philosophically has ‘nothing to do with deserving; it rests on peoples necessity, not on their merit’ and thus confers entitlements to the resources of the welfare state. In practise however it is recognised that the idea of need may be used and constructed in different ways by different sets of welfare state workers situated in different contexts (Smith 1980:1). This research is concerned with exploring the notions of need that underpin the decisions of those who implement discretionary payments within social assistance schemes in Britain (the Social Fund) and the Netherlands (*Bijzondere Bijstand*).¹ Given the lack of comparative in-depth knowledge in this area of income maintenance such an exploration might essentially tell us something not only about the principles, nature and aims of the exceptional need schemes in question, but also those of the wider social assistance schemes in which exceptional need is situated in the two countries.

To date, provision to meet exceptional need ‘in already poor families’ (Ditch 1995:337) in Britain and the Netherlands has, from a general viewpoint, been described as ‘bearing much resemblance’ (van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:11) and similarly broad contentions have been made regarding the ‘workfare’ social assistance schemes in which they are situated (Lødemel and Trickey 2001), and from where they must be understood.

¹ Often translated into English as ‘Special Assistance’.

Findings to date from the large-scale cross-national research that has been carried out would indeed tend to suggest similarities in this form of provision in the two countries. For example, universal trends identified in the factors (rising and long-term unemployment, changes in family formations) affecting the growth of means tested social assistance (van Oorschot and Schell 1991; Ditch 1999; Gough 1998) and increased conditionality and compulsion for beneficiaries (Lødemel & Trickey 2001) might well serve as evidence of convergence in this area of provision.

Yet, as Goodin et al (1999:4) point out, in a comparative perspective, subtle differences in welfare policies and programmes in different countries can, upon closer inspection, effectively be seen to serve diverse goals and objectives. Taking benefits 'simply by their names', may thus be misleading, and suggests the need to look at 'the functions of different benefits' (Eardley et al 1996b:1) in what are argued to be distinct welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999) imbued with different sets of social and political values (Pollit 1997:369).

That the similar policy responses noted above will have embedded themselves in different structures and traditions of social assistance in Britain and the Netherlands, is evidenced but not explored, by the assertion that 'workfare' strengthens an already established tradition of cash-care provision in the Netherlands, while in the UK it re-introduces a social work role to systems where cash and care have previously been separated' (Lødemel and Trickey 2001:29). Pressures for convergence in exceptional need provision within the two countries

therefore, must essentially have taken account of the rather 'diverse structures of state schemes' (Craig 1992:53) which might have exerted a powerful influence on the development of policy (Mabbett & Bolderson 1999:50). Hence subtle cross-national differences, as well as similarities, may have emerged as policies were carved out in their specific national contexts.

In particular we might expect that differences in both the degree of centralisation and the tradition of cash/care provision in this area might have affected the dynamic between the implementation of exceptional need schemes and the 'workfare' social assistance schemes in which they are situated in the two countries. Compared to the Netherlands (as chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate) the historical development of exceptional need provision in Britain can be seen to have affected the degree to which it was later incorporated (in both the administration and aims) of 'welfare to work'.

Thus from a comparative perspective, we might expect to observe a degree of diversity in the administrative perceptions of need in the two schemes. As has been recognised (Emerson & Paley 1992:246) rather than being the outcome of unconstrained personal choice, discretionary decisions that administrators make daily in their jobs will be informed by a range of contextual factors: moral, symbolic, socio-political and organisational. Primarily, such provision is situated in welfare states that are argued to belong to distinct welfare regimes. These will essentially affect the politically defined human needs that benefit levels and exceptional payments are both adequate and able to meet. Further, any diversity

between the implementation of exceptional need payments and the 'workfare' social assistance schemes in which they are situated would be expected to inform the degree to which the administrator explicitly seeks to exercise social control (Dean 1991) over beneficiaries and alter the behaviour of clients or customers in return for a discretionary payment. Such organisational goals - to 'change and/or process' (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996) clients - will further inform the context of discretionary decision making by generating specific methods and constraints for those working within them.

In sum then, it might be expected that specific configurations of social assistance will 'inform the discretionary decisions of those working within welfare organisations towards clients' (Hasenfeld & Weaver 1986:239) and thus in a comparative perspective influence the discretionary decisions that the workers make daily regarding whom might be thought to need what, and why (Van Oorschot 2000).

As Hill (2000:516) argues, comparative studies in this area of social policy have essentially reached the stage at which it is necessary to supplement large multi-country comparisons with smaller, largely qualitative ones. Employing a case-study approach, the present research is concerned to root this form of social protection in its particular socio-political, historical and cultural setting (Hantrais & Mangen 1996:5) thereby bringing a 'historical awareness and sensitivity towards cross-national similarities and differences' (Clasen 1999:2). It thus seeks to identify and explain 'systematic patterns of similarities and differences' (Ragin

1994:108) in the development and implementation of policy in the area of exceptional need provision.

The main aim of the research may be stated as being:

To identify and explain systematic patterns of similarities and differences in the implementation of discretionary exceptional need payments within social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands.

This can be broken down into two sub-aims, the first being:

1. To provide an understanding of the nature of exceptional need provision within social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands by examining institutional and policy differences in systems of provision.

The specific objectives that will be pursued to meet this aim are:

1.i To provide an account of the historical development of policy in this area, identifying factors of convergence and divergence. How have similar pressures (changes in family formations and labour markets) impacted on this area of policy, considering the country specific configurations of social assistance provision?

1.ii To document the current systems, and institutional configurations of social assistance and exceptional need provision in the two countries under study.

1.iii To assess where, and for what purposes or needs, exceptional payments can be accessed.

The second aim of the research is:

2. To compare the administrative techniques and practises employed in the implementation of exceptional need policies in both countries.

The specific objectives that will be pursued to meet this aim are, to determine empirically:

2.i What administrators are concerned to do with, for or to clients. Are they concerned to classify and dispose of applicants and/or to seek a change in the client's behaviour for the discretionary payment?

2.ii To explore the conceptual framework which underlies the administrative allocation of resources.

2.iii To illustrate the concepts and distinctions (i.e. administrative criteria of deservingness) which might be utilised by administrators to guide or inform discretionary decisions with regard to prioritising 'those in need' and thus eligible for assistance.

Having outlined the rationale and aims of the study, the remainder of this chapter provides a brief overview of the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 is concerned

with identifying and theorising the implications that differing configurations of social assistance might have for the factors informing the discretionary decisions of the two sets of administrators. It begins by reviewing the wider cross-national literature on welfare states and typologies of social assistance before identifying the more specific theoretical literature (people processing/changing, organisational theory) and analytical concepts (need, deserving and undeserving poor) that will be used for the analysis of discretionary decision making in the exceptional need schemes in the two countries. The chapter concludes with a number of theoretical hypotheses.

The definition, origin, development and nature of exceptional need policy within social assistance provision in the two countries under study are the subject of chapter 3. Essentially, whilst a number of similarities and differences in the development of exceptional need and social assistance provision are highlighted, the chapter demonstrates that the origins of this form of social protection have led to quite different traditions and configurations in the two countries. Similar issues in policy development in the late 1980s and early 1990s embodied in the projects of 'Managed Liberalisation' in the Netherlands and 'New Managerialism' in Britain saw the emergence of budget limited exceptional need schemes and increased discretion to the locality. The degree of centralisation and cash and/or care previously established in this area of income maintenance however essentially affected whether such provision was incorporated into the administration of an activating social assistance or not. *Bijzondere Bijstand* was

firmly situated in an ‘activity fare’² context whilst the Social Fund remained largely separate from the administration of ‘welfare to work’³ in Britain.

Drawing on the theoretical propositions outlined in chapter 2, the chapter concludes by hypothesising that the Dutch administrators in their configuration of social assistance were expected to be concerned with paternalistically changing the behavior of social assistance beneficiaries, whilst the British administrators were expected to be more concerned with managerially people processing applicants for a discretionary payment.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach taken and highlights a number of issues that were faced in regards to accessing primary and secondary data sources for this cross-national case study. It highlights the benefits of the specific methods employed and justifies the researcher’s analytical interpretations by noting the limitations on the data that arose from the challenges encountered in applying the qualitative methodology cross-nationally.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the comparative findings and analysis. Chapter 5 illustrates that, in line with the divergent cash/care traditions of social assistance in the two countries, the two sets of workers have essentially followed quite different paths to their respective occupations. Tracing the administrative routes

² Where education, training and voluntary work are seen as important in getting clients to the labour market.

³ This term covers a relatively wide range of policies designed to encourage and facilitate labour market participation including the ‘New Deals’, changes to the tax and benefit systems, the National Minimum Wage and child care provisions (Millar 2000:iv).

to employment highlights that the workers were motivated to apply for their specific, and what they perceive to be stigmatised, positions of employment by quite different concerns. The chapter illustrates that the Dutch administrators actively sought out their 'helping professions' and had previously completed some course of study congruent with 'people changing' such as social work or teaching. Social Fund administrators in Britain in contrast were attracted more by the perception of the Civil Service as a 'steady career' and entered with a bureaucratic background rather than a professional one. The chapter argues that these different personal resources that they bring to their jobs will directly affect how they think about and perceive the poor and poverty.

Notwithstanding these differences in the administrative backgrounds, chapter 6 illustrates that both sets of workers clearly perceive themselves to be 'helping people' and have similar 'moral codes' (Knegt 1987) as to who should be helped, how much and under what conditions. The nature and degree to which they can administer provision in line with these values of personal responsibility is however, argued to be informed and constrained by their specific organisational goals, methods and constraints. The chapter illustrates that the Dutch administrators are concerned with meeting exceptional need whilst having to 'activate' beneficiaries either socially or to the labour market. They thus use *Bijzondere Bijstand* as a tool of paternalistic implementation. Conversely, Britain's managerial officers are charged with meeting exceptional need in the context of tight directions, a limited budget and targets for clearing work. The

means of implementation to achieve these objectives, in a comparative context, become less important and their concern is with rationing very scarce resources over a large number of applicants. Rather than attempting to change the behaviour of applicants with a discretionary payment, they are more concerned with awarding to those beneficiaries who 'haven't had a payment before'.

In further exploring the country specific criteria of deservingness to emerge from their institutional configurations of social assistance, chapter 7 illustrates the similar meanings with which both sets of administrators imbue the discretionary forms of payment at their disposal: loans and grants. It argues that in a comparative context the Dutch administrators are able to explicitly regulate behaviour with discretionary payments in accordance with the values of work and family responsibility. British officers on the other hand do not have the time, resources or methods at their disposal that would allow them to work on the 'habits and economies of the poor' (Dean 1991:57) in the same way.

Chapter 8, the final analysis chapter, illustrates and discusses the constructions of human need that the workers employ. It illustrates that administrators in both countries do not consider the needs of an abstract humanity. Rather they consider the needs of social assistance beneficiaries and interpret these in accordance with the principle of personal responsibility. This shared principle however, had to work its way through the specific configurations of social assistance in which the administrators were situated. Comparatively speaking, such contexts were able to structure and inform the degree to which

administrators could administer payments according to absolute and relative notions of need. Notwithstanding this difference however, the chapter essentially argues that the workers operated with a mega conception of 'normative' need (Bradshaw 1972) rather than with a fixed and objective definition. In practice the social construction of need was dynamic, contingent and partly underpinned by a strong relationship between work and consumption. Both sets of workers perceived that social assistance beneficiaries, by definition 'inadequate producers' had a responsibility to 'live within their means, to manage on what they got', and to accept the status position of an 'inadequate consumer' (Bauman 1998). Whether operating with more or less recourse to notions of absolute or relative conceptions of poverty, administrators in both exceptional need systems ultimately sought to constrain the 'choices' of social assistance beneficiaries in Sen's (1983:161) absolute sense.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the main comparative findings before discussing the implications of the research.

Chapter 2 Contextualising discretion: welfare states, configurations of social assistance and perceptions of human need

As the previous chapter argued, whilst Britain and the Netherlands have nominally similar discretionary payment systems within social assistance provision, empirical investigation might reveal that these serve subtly different goals and objectives in a national context (Goodin et al 1999:4). Thus, 'assumptions that inform discretionary decisions have of necessity to be located within much broader social structural concerns' (Adler and Asquith 1981:11).

This chapter is concerned with theorising the implications that differing configurations of social assistance might be expected to have for the (moral, symbolic, socio-political, economic and organisational) factors that might essentially inform the discretionary decisions concerning the needs of social assistance beneficiaries of the two sets of administrators. It thus begins by reviewing some of the wider cross-national literature on welfare states and social assistance before moving on to identify the more specific theoretical literature and analytical concepts that will be used for the analysis of the implementation of discretionary payments in the two countries.

Comparative welfare state research

Given the focus on discretionary decision-making within social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands, the present research is essentially a qualitative cross-national case study (see chapter 4 for a full discussion) in the substantive area of social security. Whilst cross-national case studies of a single policy area in a small number of countries such as this are said to

constitute the latest generation of comparative studies (Abrahamson 1999:409; Clasen 1999:3; Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:48) they are broadly related to a wider body of comparative research on welfare states, conducted from a multiplicity of theoretical viewpoints.

Broadly speaking, much of the larger scale multi-country research in cross-national welfare state research has been concerned with testing, so called 'meta-narrative' - functionalist and conflict - theories of 'convergence'. The basic premise of the latter theories is that along with economic development 'countries with contrasting cultural and political traditions will become more alike in their strategy for constructing the floor below which no-one falls' (quoted in Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:43) whether this refers to expansion or retrenchment. Formerly, this manifested itself in arguments that, for example, democratic states would increase their welfare spending. In recent times, the concern has been that global competitiveness will lead welfare states to embark on a 'race to the bottom' of social protection for citizens (Kvist 2004).

It has been argued however, that the forms of explanation provided by such large scale projects concerned with broad trends and generalisations in a number of industrial societies do little to increase our understanding of phenomena in different social, political and cultural contexts (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:5). The logico-deductive structure of globalisation theory for example means that it is inherently 'universal' or applicable in any setting, rather than what some commentators would consider comparative: in the sense of gaining insights by highlighting differences (Mabbett and Bolderson

1999:48); or differences and similarities (Ragin 1997) between countries. Similarly, the point has been made that large-scale research that focuses on the single parameter of national social spending tells us little about the roles of, principles within or distributional impacts of different welfare arrangements across countries (Clasen 1999:2).

At the other end of the methodological spectrum however, single country, or research on one case, has often been criticised for emphasising the uniqueness of individual countries' experience. From this perspective, each country's welfare institutions and national experiences are seen as '*sui generis* – a case unto itself (Goodin et al 1999:12; Ebbinghaus 2003:14).

Worlds of welfare capitalism

Of particular relevance to the present research, is the attempt to steer a middle ground through the latter theoretical stances, by combining quantitative indicators with qualitative classifications (Ebbinghaus 2003:24), provided by Esping-Andersen's (1990) thesis on worlds of welfare capitalism.¹ Unlike the multi-country studies discussed above, this approach does not narrowly associate the welfare state with public transfers, in cash or in kind. Rather, it recognises that welfare states of that narrower sort are all embedded in larger capitalist socio-economic orders which promote peoples' welfare or wellbeing more broadly construed, by various other means as well (Goodin et al 1999:5). Esping-Andersen therefore uses the term welfare regime to refer to a larger constellation of socio-economic institutions: the

¹ Esping-Andersen's identification of welfare regimes undoubtedly builds on, and takes further, the work of previous scholars' attempts to construct typologies of welfare states (for a fuller discussion see Abrahamson 1999).

state, market and family. Essentially, he argues that depending on the welfare mix (between the state, market and family), we will find qualitatively different arrangements in the provision of welfare in different countries (Esping-Andersen 2000:161). Seen from this broader perspective then, welfare regimes are also worlds of welfare capitalism, which embody principles about how to provide welfare for citizens in a capitalist economy founded on the cash-nexus.

Essentially, Esping-Andersen (1999:4) argues that, as post world war two European nations build divergent welfare regimes, differing cultural and political factors, or configurations of welfare will structure, or mediate the way that countries respond to international and global pressures: making adaptation 'institutionally path dependent'. While policies may appear to be converging on a broad level (for example cutbacks or retrenchment in the form of 'workfare'), it is argued that new divergences will emerge as these policies evolve in a particular national context. Existing policy programmes, labour markets and labour market policies, as well as the relationship between central and local government, are among the factors that contribute to substantial differences in the way that policies are chiselled out. In effect, what we may find is a situation of 'divergence in convergence' (Lødemel 1999).

Within the diversity of what a number of European countries call their welfare state, Esping-Andersen identifies a few clear clusters, which he illustrates by the use of three welfare regime typologies: social democratic, liberal and conservative (discussed below). Depending on the welfare mix - between the

state, market and family in the provision of welfare - welfare regimes, with their particular programmes and policies, are argued to bunch together particular values, for example equality, status-maintenance or self-reliance (discussed below). In contrast to those who would seek 'universal theories' of welfare state development in industrial societies then, the implication of Esping-Andersen's work is that different types of welfare states can co-exist in a global economy (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:48).

Moving from the 'black box' of expenditure to the content of welfare states therefore illustrates differences between countries in targeted versus universalistic programmes; conditions of eligibility; quality of benefits and services and the extent to which employment and working life are encompassed in the states' extension of citizens rights (Esping-Andersen 2000:156). Such factors for Esping-Andersen constitute nothing less than the 'theoretical substance of welfare states' (2000:155).

Esping-Andersen focuses on income maintenance programmes and uses the concepts of de-commodification and modes of stratification (Esping-Andersen 1990:74) as the basis for his analysis and construction of regime typologies. The concept of de-commodification is meant to capture the degree to which welfare states weaken the cash nexus by granting entitlements independent of labour market participation. The particular focus is whether individuals or families can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation (Esping-Andersen 1990:37). Intricately related perhaps to the welfare state values referred to above, modes of stratification refer to

the main divisions in society fostered by welfare regimes: between rich and poor or core and marginalised workers for example.

Rather than considering regimes as interchangeable models that countries could effectively pick and choose from, Esping-Andersen explicates the institutional and ideological basis underpinning them and argues that what determines which model applies is not (a stage in historical) development, but ideology (Abrahamson 1999:396). As will be highlighted, these ideological underpinnings are to be found in the relative weight that regimes give to different types of (means-tested, social insurance, and universal) benefits. The regime labels that represent Esping-Andersen's clusters: liberal, conservative and social democratic, reflect the political and ideological thrust that was dominant in their historical evolution, climaxing with the mature welfare states in the 1970s and 1980s. These will be briefly outlined below, before considering the implications for the two countries under study.

Liberal regime

The liberal welfare regime emerged from 19th century political economy, which harboured an unbounded faith in market sovereignty. It is thus imbued with notions of 'self-help' and 'less-eligibility'. In their contemporary form, Esping-Andersen (1999:74/75) maintains that such regimes reflect a political commitment to minimise the state, to individualise risks, and to promote market solutions. There are three core elements that characterise the liberal regime. It is firstly residual in the sense that social guarantees are typically restricted to 'bad risks': in other words state welfare is restricted to those who have been unable to provide for themselves through the market, or to those

for whom the market has failed. Such welfare regimes thus adopt a narrow definition of who should be eligible, and are reminiscent of 19th century poor relief, favouring tax financed means or income tested benefits so as to ascertain desert and need. Reflecting the principle of 'less-eligibility' benefit levels are usually low, beneath the wages of the lowest paid labourer, in order to discourage people from relying on the state.

Liberal policy is further residual in that it adheres to a narrow conception of which risks should be considered 'social'. The third characteristic of a liberal system is its encouragement of the market, and thus the state may provide subsidies to encourage private and occupational welfare. Essentially, the residual approach might be said to narrow the social consciousness and cultivate a societal dualism: good risks are seen as being self-reliant in the market, the bad ones become 'welfare dependants'.

Social democratic regime

At the other extreme, the social democratic welfare regime is inevitably a state-dominated welfare nexus. Concomitantly, there is a strong accent on de-familialisation, universalism and the marginalisation of private welfare. The social democratic welfare state is committed to comprehensive risk coverage, generous benefit levels and egalitarianism. Rights are attached to individuals and are based on citizenship, rather than on an employment relation or demonstrated need. The social democratic regime is distinct for its active and explicit effort to de-commodify labour and to minimise market dependency (Esping-Andersen 1999:78). It thus fosters the value of equality and the egalitarian element is embodied in the practice of universalism. Everybody

enjoys the same rights and (tax financed) benefits whether rich or poor. The welfare state is thus concerned with redistribution, the active promotion of well-being and life chances for all and the elimination of poverty (Esping-Andersen 1999:80).

Conservative regime

According to Esping-Andersen the essence of a conservative regime lies in its blend of status segmentation along the lines of occupational class² and familialism (Esping-Andersen 1999:82). The accent in this regime, is not universalism or tests of need, but on social insurance, stressing the primacy of the employment relation. The stress on social insurance is therefore said to foster divisions between core and marginalised workers. The subsidiarity principle (that the state should step in only after the family has failed), rather than the liberal notion of 'self-help' (through the market) underlies the regimes' stress on familialism: hence a male-breadwinner bias of social protection and of the family as care giver and ultimately responsible for its members' welfare (Esping-Andersen 1999:83).

Esping-Andersen's seminal (1990) work prompted much debate and empirical research. Critics maintained that the three worlds typology was too narrowly based on income maintenance programmes, too focused on only the state market nexus, and too one dimensionally built around the standard male production worker (Esping-Andersen 1999:73; Lewis 1992). The concept of de-commodification inherently presupposes that individuals are already commodified, therefore it is argued that it more adequately describes the

² Also referred to as the corporatist approach: it pools risks by status membership.

relationship between (full time) male earners and welfare states³. Commentators have also challenged whether three regime typologies can adequately represent such a range of diverse welfare states (Kasza 2002:271). However compelling the criticisms and refutations levied towards the three worlds thesis, Goodin et al (1999:12) argue that Esping-Andersen's work has become a well-established landmark in relation to which subsequent research should situate itself.

In relation to the present research on discretionary decision-making within social assistance in Britain and the Netherlands, Esping-Andersen's specific argument concerning the different institutional and ideological basis underpinning any given country's welfare state might be particularly relevant for what we might expect to find in the administration of discretionary payments. Primarily we might hypothesise that any given regime would be expected to influence not only the implementation structure of discretionary payments within social assistance policy *vis á vis* central and local government (outlined fully in chapter 3) but also the values and perceptions of need that administrators of discretionary payments would utilise in their daily jobs. In order to hypothesise what these influences might be, the chapter now moves on to consider how Britain and the Netherlands have been typified. In doing so, it confronts further criticisms of Esping-Andersen's typologising exercise: the appropriateness of his specific clustering of nation states into one of the regime types.

³ For women, the concept of de-commodification may be inoperable unless welfare states to begin with, help them become commodified, a point later addressed by Esping-Andersen (1999:45).

Britain and the Netherlands: distinct regimes?

Notably for the present research, Esping-Andersen concedes that, in their own way, both Britain and the Netherlands may be said to fit poorly into any of the three regime clusters (1999:86).⁴ Nevertheless, he typifies the welfare states of the Netherlands and the UK as 'conservative' and 'liberal' respectively.

In regards to the Netherlands, the recognised difficulty of fit into the conservative regime is illustrated in Goodin et al's (1999:11) argument that whilst the Netherlands may be a less archetypal representation of the 'social democratic welfare regime', it does nevertheless sit squarely within that camp when defined in terms of the vigorous public pursuit of income redistribution and, through that, social equality. Similarly, Becker (2000:220) makes the point that only the Danish and Swedish welfare systems are more generous than the Dutch. Esping-Andersen (1999:79) however, whilst acknowledging that the Dutch de-commodification scores are hardly inferior to the generous income replacement provided by the Danish welfare state, maintains that in order to be uniquely social democratic, universalism must be fused both with generosity and a comprehensive socialisation of risks. As he points out, and Goodin et al (1999:11) also recognise, the Netherlands is not a 'servicing state' catering for family care needs like the Nordic ones are.

According to van Kersbergen (1997:314) the development of the generous Dutch income maintenance system owes much to the pillorised nature of

⁴ Given of course that countries can never represent 'ideal types' – a point Becker (2000:221) argues is often confused by those who would confuse the term 'classify' with 'typify'.

Dutch society. Social policy has effectively functioned as a central means to mediate social and political conflicts and 'the politics of social welfare in the Netherlands has been an indispensable constituent of the development of a stable democracy in a segmented society .. without the development of an extensive and generous system of social compensation, the consociational or consensus democracy of the Netherlands would never have prospered as it did' (van Kersbergen 1997:314).

Dutch politics is therefore said to be a politics of accommodation, where four segments of society – catholic, protestant, socialist and liberal – compete and co-operate in a paradoxical situation of extremely segmented yet stable democracy. The influence of the Christian democrats on social policy is an expression of this (partly) religious polarisation. What predominated was a paternalist Christian, in particular catholic, social doctrine of social policy. 'Caring' for the weak, for the victims of unemployment or sickness therefore, was a central political and ideological issue and translated to generous and passive benefits (van Kersbergen and Becker 1988:494).

However, on almost every index of his conservative typology Esping-Andersen (1999:82) proceeds to point out that the Netherlands 'deviates markedly' from the corporatist mould in regards to having universal flat-rate (rather than status maintaining) pensions and 'pillared' service providers. Similarly, the Netherlands constitutes a 'notable exception' in that mandated company pension schemes play a 'non-trivial' role in the labour market (Esping-Andersen 1999:83).

Britain on the other hand has been characterised by Esping-Andersen (1999:77) as a 'liberal welfare regime', a typification which, as Abrahamson (1999:401) points out, has largely been accepted by most scholars in the field. That said, the UK does exhibit signs of 'universalism' e.g. the comprehensive National Health Service. However, it is the relative weight of needs-based assistance compared to rights based programmes that constitutes an indicator of liberalism, with international comparisons illustrating the dominance of means-testing in the UK (Esping-Andersen 1999:75). Further indicators include the narrow conception of what risks should be considered 'social' (for example, until recently child-care costs were excluded) and the encouragement of the market exemplified by the Thatcher era in the UK (1999:76).

Esping-Andersen's explanation concerning the particular lack of fit of the two countries under study centres on the fact that the typologies do not take into account mutation. Britain's regime shifting thus makes it appear increasingly liberal after the 1970s, due to labour market de-regulation and increased targeting and privatisation during the 1980s. Previously however, in the immediate post-war decades, Britain would have been placed alongside the Scandinavian countries with its universal flat-rate benefit programmes, national health care and vocal commitment to full employment. Thus, Castles and Mitchell (1993:94) make the point that the UK can not easily be classed as a liberal welfare state in the same way as the USA because of its status as the international exemplar of the comprehensive welfare state in the decades following World War 2, which place it firmly in the 'welfare state's roll of honour'. The authors further contend that the prevalence of means-testing in

any welfare state – which, in respect to de-commodification, Esping-Andersen (1990:48) scores low because entitlements are built around demonstrable need which does not properly extend citizen rights - can actually be seen as ‘radical’ in the sense of the equalising principle of (vertical) redistribution. They further point out that means-tested benefits may offer relatively generous replacement ratios. As following parts of the chapter will highlight however, the latter point does not seem to be applicable to the UK in a comparative context.

The Netherlands is ambiguous for a different reason: the typology’s focus on income maintenance. Thus, as seen, the Netherlands appears ‘social democratic’ in the sense of strong universalism, comprehensive coverage, and generous ‘de-commodifying’ benefits. But when we include social service delivery, and when more generally we examine the role of the family, the Netherlands becomes squarely a member of the ‘conservative’ Continental European fold. It is in its sustained lack of attention to social services that the Netherlands emerges as a prototypical example of Catholic familialism. The generosity of the Dutch income maintenance system from this perspective is therefore chiefly the expression of a pervasive male breadwinner assumption (i.e. that a man’s replacement wage should be adequate for his family). Further, Esping-Andersen (1999:83) argues that if we limit the study of de-commodification to standard income transfer maintenance programmes, the great regime divide is not social democracy versus the rest, but the uniquely modest benefits provided by the liberal regime in comparison to the rest.

These welfare regimes then effectively form the backdrop against which discretionary payments within social assistance are implemented in Britain and the Netherlands. Generally speaking we might expect some differences on a comparative level in the relative salience of means tested social assistance in the two countries and in the values and perceptions of need that employees of the respective welfare states would employ. However, whilst useful for such broad and initial hypothesis, a forceful argument concerns the point that regime theory is limited in trying to gain an in-depth comparative understanding of a particular policy area within or between countries (Kasza 2002).⁵

In order to provide a more detailed lens with which to observe diversity in the two systems under study than is provided by regime theory, the chapter now moves on to consider the national social assistance schemes in which the discretionary payment schemes are embedded, and from where they must be understood (Ditch 1995; Craig 1992). In doing so it highlights that means tested social assistance differs in both scope and structure in the two countries under study. These country specific configurations of social assistance might further be expected to influence the implementation of discretionary payments.

⁵ Esping-Andersen (1999:73/74) refutes such criticism by arguing that the latter critics miss the point: the basis for his typology construction, and comparison, is indeed welfare regimes, the ways in which welfare production is allocated between state, market and households, not welfare states or individual social policies.

Social assistance: the last resort

Social assistance has been characterised as that form of income maintenance designed for those citizens 'in need': without any other means of securing their subsistence (Ditch et al 1997:3; Millar 2003:2). Rather than being citizenship or contribution based, eligibility is determined by a test of means, which is Esping-Andersen's main objection to it (1990:48) since it does not constitute a 'right' for citizens. It can therefore be argued that this form of social protection bears most resemblance to the Poor Law of the 19th century, and constitutes the 'margin of the Welfare State' (Leibfried 2000:191). We might conceptualise exceptional need payments as being for costs which are not always expected to be met by way of general social assistance, therefore constituting the very line at which the margin is drawn.

Much of the large-scale cross-national literature to date in this area has identified a number of 'common trends' in the provision of social assistance, which might be seen to lend credence to the argument for welfare state 'convergence' outlined earlier. The most prevalent trend: towards an increased reliance on this form of income maintenance has been documented by many commentators (Van Oorschot and Schell 1991, Ditch 1999, Gough 1998). The growth in the numbers reliant on social assistance in the 1980s is argued to constitute a reversal of an earlier twentieth century 'general pattern' in social security, which saw older forms of public assistance replaced with social insurance and in some countries universal benefits (Gough 1998:12).

The 'pull' factors responsible for the growing reliance on social assistance have in part been identified as stemming from the emergence in this period of new 'risk' groups, for whom existing social insurance schemes were never

designed to cover. As van Oorschot and Schell (1991:202) argue, social insurance schemes were not constructed with the societal processes of mass, and long term unemployment or lone parenthood in mind. We thus witness a remarkable growth in the demand for social assistance. Moreover, it has been argued that international institutions and agencies such as the World Bank and European Union currently constitute further 'push' factors by espousing, at least in the context of newly forming eastern and central European countries, a reliance on social assistance (Ditch 1999:120). As Eardley et al (1996a:21) note, the argument that levels of social security expenditure requiring relatively high taxation and employer costs can damage economic effort have become increasingly important in economic and political discourse. The consequences of such forms of targeting advocated by the World Bank and pursued in recent times by many European governments have been well documented: the mechanics of means-testing result in low take up, intrusive inquiries, stigma, poverty and unemployment traps (Ditch 1999:121).

However, while the latter literature might be said to highlight some of the universal issues and patterns in social assistance on a comparative level, there is currently a 'mis-match' between the salience of means tested social assistance and cross-national research (Gough 1998:3) particularly of an in-depth character. Two recent contributions to the field that begin to address this gap do not include either the UK or the Netherlands in their comparative analysis (Heikkilä and Keskitalo 2001; Saraceno 2002). We therefore have little comparative knowledge of the nature of such schemes, or for present purposes, of how they might be expected to inform the implementation of discretionary payments.

That said, a relatively detailed 'mapping' exercise of social assistance in OECD countries has been provided by Eardley et al (1996a/b). While undoubtedly useful, it might be argued that this research endeavour falls short of in-depth analysis or understanding. In the relatively unexplored field of cross-national social assistance therefore, the longer-term challenge remains to 'theorise the development of social assistance in an international perspective' (Ditch 1999:115). To this end, the following section of the chapter outlines typologies of social assistance and their implications for the present study.

Typologies of social assistance

Social assistance schemes have been classified by the use of key variables: localisation, funding and administration (Lødemel cited in Eardley et al 1996a: 24). As with any typologising exercise, we see that the UK does not fit easily into a social assistance regime as such, and has been posited as a distinct social assistance tradition: nationalised and with little social work involvement. The Netherlands is aligned with Austria, Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. These continental social assistance regimes are decentralised, but to a lesser degree than the Nordic countries (in that the former are mostly financed by central government). However, as in the Nordic countries, the current provision of social assistance in the Netherlands contains links with social work and social care.

The above typologies begin to intimate something of the differences in the two schemes under study and we are further assisted here by Lødemel (1997)

who traces the development of social assistance and its inter-relationship with social insurance schemes in Britain and Norway from 1946 to 1966. In doing so he notes a 'paradox'. Although Norway is considered to have an institutionalised, or social democratic welfare state, Norwegian social assistance provision carries more resonance's of the Poor Law than does its British counterpart. Partly, this can be explained by the more cautious and incremental introduction of Norwegian social insurance schemes. The later establishment of Norwegian localised social assistance provision thus resulted in the integration of cash and care because the 'problems' of the 'residual' target groups not yet included by some form of social insurance were seen to warrant more than just the provision of cash assistance by policy makers. Conversely, in Britain, cash and care were separated with the establishment of centralised social insurance and social assistance programs in a relatively short space of time (1946 and 1948 respectively). Ultimately, the two countries can be seen to have pursued very different means of breaking down their Poor Law. Thus, while Ditch (1999:116) notes that throughout European countries social assistance is in all contexts the benefit of 'last resort'; Lødemel leads us to ask, last resort for whom?

Given the latter research, we might hypothesise that, as Lødemel demonstrates for Norway, the earlier establishment of social insurance in the Netherlands (unemployment insurance and old age pensions were established in the 1950s (Muffels and Dirven (1999:1)) and the later establishment of nationally financed social assistance (1965) might have influenced the nature of Dutch social assistance provision, in that a relationship between cash and care was thought necessary for the 'residuum',

who were not already covered by some form of social insurance (see chapter 3).

In this vein, the Ministry for Social Affairs in the Netherlands explains that 'during the processing of an application for assistance, attention must be paid to all other aspects of the problem. Help is often provided in this respect even if it has not been requested, including actively trying to find the psycho-social problem underlying the application for assistance.. and mapping out the course of action to be taken in rendering assistance' (Ministry for Social Affairs 1990:96). In comparison to the UK, where social assistance was explicitly separated from 'care', those who implement exceptional need payments in the Netherlands may perceive that applicants require more than financial help.

Minimum income: relatively speaking

In emphasising the residual nature of Norwegian social assistance Lødemel seems to imply that it is somehow inferior in comparison to Britain's scheme. However, as Hill (2000:517/518) notes, benefit levels in Norway are twice as high as those provided by British social assistance. Thus extremely centralised social assistance schemes do not necessarily imply a more generous redistribution than extremely decentralised ones (Holsch and Kraus 2004:143). This point is of particular relevance for the present research. We might hypothesise that the relative levels of need met by social assistance benefit in Britain and the Netherlands will relate directly to the needs or costs that can be met by way of exceptional provision, and thereby inform the discretionary decisions of those who implement the two schemes.

In this respect, Veit-Wilson (1998:72) argues that blanket 'ideas of minimum subsistence needs or social assistance regimes are very misleading' especially when we compare how, or even if, governments conceptualise a 'minimum income standard'. Thus while the benefit rates for social assistance are set by central government in both Britain and the Netherlands it is perhaps important to consider the respective criteria used. Presently, the national social assistance rates in the Netherlands are linked to the Dutch minimum wage. Statutory minimum wage rates, in their turn, were based on the idea that they should be adequate for social participation by families dependent on a single breadwinner (Veit-Wilson 1998:73), which can be seen to give some credence to Esping-Andersen's typologising of the Netherlands as a conservative regime: benefit rates are higher because they are based on the assumption of a 'male breadwinner'. The Dutch social assistance act refers explicitly to meeting 'essential needs' such as 'food and drink, clothing, housing, heating, furniture and recreation' which are considered necessary 'to enable the individual to live a life worthy of a human being' (Ministry for Social Affairs 1990:95).

Conversely in the UK it is argued that the income support system has no principled relation to any minimum standard or conception of a minimum level of living. Thus, in contrast to the Dutch system, 'current rates are not the result of any single calculation or historic set of rules' (Eardley et al 1996b:396). Rather, the benefit level is said to be determined by the principle of 'less-eligibility' (in that benefit levels should not exceed the rate of the lowest paid worker) and public expenditure considerations (Veit-Wilson

1998:100). The inclusion of standard amounts in social assistance benefit rates in the Netherlands for holidays for example indicate that beneficiaries are thought to be entitled to a quality of life which is 'not distinct' from that of other citizens (Eardley et al 1996b: 288). Conceptions of the 'organic integrated community' in setting poverty levels for the Netherlands are contrasted with the British political concern with provision for 'the poor' (Veit-Wilson 1998:97). In her comparison of social assistance schemes, Kuivalainen (1998) found that the Dutch and the Danish systems guaranteed the most generous level of benefit when compared to the UK, Sweden and Finland.⁶ It might be hypothesised therefore that while both social assistance and exceptional need schemes in the two countries under study are intended to meet the needs of those on benefit for long periods of time, there might be differences in the degrees to which they are concerned with alleviating, 'curing' or preventing 'states of persistent dependency' (Muffels and Fouarge 2000: 25/26).

When comparing Western welfare states, Muffels et al (2000:4) argue that we are talking about relative rather than absolute conceptions of poverty. However, we can see from the above that there are different levels of provision in Britain and the Netherlands that might be seen to fit along a continuum of absolute/relative political definitions of poverty. These levels of provision might embody different conceptualisations of the needs of social assistance clients and inform the discretionary decisions of the workers accordingly.

A further critique of Lødemel's (1997) study centres around the fact that the time period of his analysis (1944-1966) negates both the ensuing rise in the number of social assistance beneficiaries across Europe and a corresponding move away from 'rights' towards 'obligations' in the nature of provision. Evidence for the growth in cash social assistance spending as a proportion of GDP is forwarded by Eardley et al (1996a:37). In 1980 the figure for the Netherlands was 1.7% rising to 2.2% in 1992. In Britain the figure stood at 1.4% in 1980, reaching 2.6% in 1992 (Eardley et al 1996a:37). Until the 1980s a tradition of full employment and/or universal welfare provision had relegated social assistance to the margins of social protection in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands (Gough 1998:26). Thus when we consider social assistance as a proportion of overall social security spending, we see that in Britain this rose from 21.9% in 1980 to 33.0% in 1992. In the Netherlands the respective figures were 8.3% and 10.9%: reflecting that social assistance has always played a bigger part in the British income maintenance system (Eardley 1996a:37).

'Workfare'

The rising number of claimants is said to underlie a further general trend identified in this last resort form of income maintenance across Europe: a concern with containing expenditure. This is exemplified by the increasing compulsion and/or conditionality for those in receipt of social assistance benefit (Ditch and Oldfield 1999:76; Heikkilä and Keskitalo 2001; Lødemel and Trickey 2001). Hill (2000:517) argues that the tide in the growth of rights

⁶ Using model families and purchasing power parities (which take account of differences in

was turned back as assistance clientele came to be dominated by those often deemed to be the 'undeserving poor'. 'What to do about the able bodied poor who do not work' might be said to represent an enduring theme in social security provision (Hecló 1974:13; Shragge 1997:19). Similarly, Lødemel (1999) argues that the presence of able-bodied recipients of cash benefits has always raised political debates with strong moral undertones. The current debate on 'workfare'⁷ for the able-bodied reliant on social assistance in Europe stems not just from concerns about the cost of maintaining their income, but also reflects assumptions that passive measures discourage initiative, undermine the work ethic and foster dependence, thus contributing to the incidence and duration of the problem they were intended to alleviate (Anderson 1991).

Such arguments often carry paternalistic overtones in that the assumption is that the poor are being compelled to do what is good for them (Mead 1997). Social assistance beneficiaries deemed 'able to work' but assumed not to be actively looking for work are seen to need the 'tough love' of 'workfare' (Shragge 1997:19, Lively 1983). Mead (1997:1) argues that paternalistic social policies such as 'workfare' 'seek to supervise the lives of poor citizens' in return for support. As such, paternalism in social programmes and policies transforms the way that they are both conceived and implemented. Such welfare programmes essentially become more demanding for the recipient and instead of a philosophy of 'entitlements' they emphasise a 'social

the prices of goods and services in each country).

⁷ It is recognised that this is a contentious term that has been used in a variety of different ways. Shragge's (1997:18) definition is that the conditions of social assistance require the individual receiving support to participate in some kind of programme.

contract' which requires that beneficiaries satisfy behavioural requirements as well as income rules to receive aid (Mead 1997:3).

Mead (1997:1) contends that the 'defining feature' of a paternalistic policy is the 'administrative influences' they use to produce their results. Essentially, it is the administrators who must attempt to 'reduce poverty and other social problems by directive and supervisory means' (Mead 1997:2). According to Mead (1997:62) the paternalistic administrator should be concerned with helping recipients with their problems whilst pointing to the consequences if behavioural expectations are not met. The benefits on which clients depend are thus used as a 'lever to ensure compliance' (Mead 1997:5). At their best, 'like good parenting', administrative techniques should combine 'help and hassle' in attempts to get 'even troubled recipients into the program and keep them there' (Mead 1997:61).

Both the UK and the Netherlands have, in recent years, tightened conditionality in their social assistance provision for certain groups of beneficiaries, adopting 'welfare to work' and 'activity fare' policies respectively. Indeed, adding further weight to the convergence argument, Lødemel and Trickey (2001:278) argue that 'due to a fundamental change in the way that social assistance is provided' both countries can be considered to have centralised 'workfare'⁸ schemes based on case management and interested in human resource development. They argue that 'workfare'

⁸ The authors recognise the lack of agreement as to the use of the term 'workfare'. For the purposes of comparison, they define it as an ideal policy form and explore how, why and for which out-of-work populations, work for benefit policies are used.

strengthens an already established tradition of cash-care provision in the Netherlands, while in the UK it re-introduces a social work role to a system in which cash and care – as we saw earlier - have previously been separated (Lødemel and Trickey 2001:29).

The latter assertions however are made without a consideration of the structure, aims and resulting implementation of discretionary payments within social assistance. As the following chapter will illustrate, whether exceptional payments are fully integrated into a paternalistic ‘workfare’ programme is in part dependent on the administrative structure of the state. Relatively speaking, the Social Fund is not as integrated into the administration of ‘welfare to work’ as *Bijzondere Bijstand* is to an ‘activity fare’ social assistance context (see chapter 3). As Lødemel and Trickey (2001:309) note ‘similar workfare programs may exert very different influences (in this case on the discretionary payment schemes within them) depending on the characteristics of the social assistance schemes to which they are attached’. We might therefore expect some important differences in the operation of policy or the way that it is implemented on the ground within different structures or configurations of social assistance in the two countries. From a comparative perspective such differences may directly affect the degree to which administrators are able to consider beneficiaries’ exceptional needs for labour market integration in the context of similar ‘workfare’ social assistance schemes.⁹

⁹ This is not to say that exceptional payments for labour market integration are not available in other parts of the system.

Theoretically moreover, in line with the different ideological underpinnings of welfare states outlined earlier, it is recognised that similar workfare policies, which focus on the characteristics of individual welfare recipients, can manifest themselves in different types of welfare states, or welfare states imbued with different values. As Trickey (2001:255) argues, programmes that require compulsory activity from people in need of social assistance are being implemented and justified within a range of ideological settings. It is therefore recognised that there might be 'cross-national variation in the degree to which workfare is predicated on 'dependency' as opposed to social exclusion'. That said, it is also recognised that empirical research into the 'policy concepts of the crucial policy actors' (Aust and Arriba 2004:5) might illustrate that discursive reference is made to more than one of the distinct analytical paradigms (outlined below).

While the introduction of an 'activity fare' in the Netherlands can in part be viewed as economically motivated (an attempt to make social security more efficient in the sense of stimulating outflow into employment), Spies and Van Berkel (2001:107) argue that one should also consider ideological developments, which are just as important. Such developments are said to focus around the argument that "dependency' on benefit in the Netherlands had been stimulated because social policy had previously focused too much on 'care' when it should have been offering opportunities for self-sufficiency' (Spies and Van Berkel 2001:114). Central Government's call for 'work, work, work' however is not only concerned with combating dependency. An influential report from the Dutch scientific council for government policy drew on Durkheimian notions of work as the only institution in society that could

create solidarity and prevent societal disintegration, and emphasising the meaningful nature of work for individuals (Spies and Van Berkel 2001:114).¹⁰

In the UK, the rhetoric behind 'welfare to work' is said to 'oscillate between fighting a 'dependency culture' and even an 'underclass' on the one hand, and solving the problem of social exclusion on the other' (Trickey and Walker 2001:190). There is therefore a tension between a characterisation of a proportion of unemployed recipients as deserving of help (pensioners, children and those who face barriers to paid employment) and others characterised as undeserving or fraudulent (Cook 1989), who are thought to take money out of the system and away from genuine claimants (Trickey and Walker 2001:191). 'Welfare to work' is further thought to have borrowed and adapted ideas from other 'liberal' English speaking nations, in particular the United States' use of 'workfare' schemes and in work benefits (Trickey and Walker 2001: 191).

The existence of a 'dependency culture' in both Britain and the Netherlands is in part refuted by longitudinal data utilised to analyse the 'dynamics of poverty' (Leisering and Walker 1998). Longitudinal panel data illustrate that although the absolute numbers in poverty may remain constant (and high), in reality there is also a great deal of movement in those entering and leaving social assistance. The poverty dynamics for Britain and the Netherlands for the period 1990-1995¹¹ are provided by Muffels et al (2000:17). The 'transient

¹⁰ Although the authors do argue that there is a Dutch debate about the 'calculating unemployed' – and hence an increased perception of the unemployed as undeserving.

¹¹ Data for 1990- 1994 for the Netherlands and 1991-1995 for the UK.

poor' (those poor only once during the time period) were 9.7% in the Netherlands, and 13.4% in the UK. The recurrent poor (those people experiencing recurrent spells in poverty but not for longer than two years) 4.4% in the Netherlands and 9.5% in the UK and the 'persistent poor' (those poor for three years or more) 4.0% in NL and 5.5% in the UK. The authors thus argue that the results highlight that the (British) liberal welfare state has more recurrent and persistent poor than the social democratic (The Netherlands) and corporatist (Germany) welfare state types (Muffels et al 2000). Given these differences we might expect to find some (subtle) cross-national differences in the perceptions of a dependency culture among administrators.

Analysing poverty from a dynamic perspective further provides an opportunity to consider the processes or sequences of life events that lead people to enter or escape from poverty in both countries under study (Muffels et al 2000:5). In this respect, Muffels et al (2000:23) illustrate that the persistent poor are more likely to have a weaker association with the labour market because of obsolete skills, low qualifications and 'low human capital' (due to age or caring duties). The authors also imply that the majority of persistent poor in both countries are 'able-bodied'. In the Netherlands and the UK approximately 80% of the persistent poor are unemployed (Muffels et al 2000:23).

In the light of this dynamic approach to poverty analysis, some commentators have argued that, since poverty is not (for most people at least) a 'long term permanent condition' it need not be addressed by way of 'long term social

assistance programmes' (Giddens 1999:26). Conversely, others argue that the persistent poor are of concern since they are unevenly spread across the population and are comprised of very vulnerable groups in society. Hence the goal of alleviating poverty can therefore be seen to matter a great deal more in the long term than the short (Muffels et al 2000:21).

Whilst 'workfare' can partly be seen as a way of alleviating poverty in both countries, the degree to which discretionary social assistance payments are integrated into its administration would be expected to have implications for what the two sets of workers perceived they were there to do with, for or to their clients with discretionary payments. From a comparative perspective any such differences would be expected to structure the degree to which they regard 'changes in a client's behaviour (in a desired direction) important' (Lipsky 1980:59) and thus impact on their discretionary decisions.

People processing or people changing?

The roles that those employed to implement public policy adopt in dealing with clients are said to manifest themselves along a continuum of 'people processing and people changing' (Hasenfeld 1972; Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:240). 'People processing' organisations emphasise assessing and classifying clients and assigning them to various categories. Staff activities focus on collecting and processing information and on using that information in accordance with prescribed rules to determine the appropriate status of clients and how to route them to various service components (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:240). In this vein, research into the Social Fund in the UK has provided many examples of Social Fund Officers consulting the 'manual'

(provided as a guide to decision makers by central government) when considering an application for payment, or in trying to determine what 'category' of payment the applicant might be able to receive (Berthoud and Dalley 1992; Davidson 2003; Walker et al 1991). When field officers need determine only into what prescribed category an application falls, decisions might be better described as 'performed' (Elmore 1978:194).

Conversely, a 'people changing' technology emphasises attitudinal and behavioural changes in clients. Staff activities centre on developing relationships with clients in order to modify their behaviour. Decisions regarding what services clients should receive are based on an assessment of their potential to change (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:240). The latter might be hypothesised to sit well with the emphasis on the Dutch implementers activating unemployed individuals into what Spies and Van Berkel (2001:105) call an 'activity fare' (reinsertion to social participation and the labour market, discussed more fully in chapter 3) in the Netherlands and research has highlighted that administrators place a great value on clients that act in line with their reciprocal obligations for the receipt of social assistance (Knegt 1987). In comparison to 'people processing' organisations then, it might be hypothesised that tensions might arise in the form of 'role strain or confusion' (Young 1981:36), between the social work and policing role of the Dutch administrators when they are charged with meeting exceptional need in the context of needing to activate beneficiaries.

The organisational goals to 'people process' or 'people change' might also affect the relative procedures that administrators use to determine eligibility,

or make judgements about the discretionary needs of social assistance beneficiaries. We might hypothesise, for instance, that those charged with 'people changing' will have more knowledge about their clients, and might have more opportunities to engage in face to face meetings with them. 'People processing' modes of decision-making however, might be more 'impersonal' (Sims et al 1993:125) and the decision might be made from an application form. Given that such methods (along with the goals outlined above) are part of the organisational structures in which administrators work, the following section of the chapter will consider a range of theories on the processes by which social policies are translated into administrative action (Elmore 1997:241). The relevance of this body of literature for the present research is that, from a comparative perspective, the organisational goals and the subsequent contexts and constraints (outlined in the following chapter) which these generate might be expected to affect the degree of discretion that the workers can exercise.

Organisational theory and the implementation of social policy

Much of the literature on social policy and organisations is concerned with the best means to the end of implementation and the subsequent avoidance of policy failure. One of the main concerns of organisational theories is thus to provide prescriptions on how to get those on the ground, the administrators of any given policy, to do what higher level policy makers want them to: whether or not this accords with their personal values or opinions.¹²

¹² It is recognised that some theorists (Lipsky 1980) argue that there can be no sharp distinction between policy making and policy implementation.

Alongside the ideal typical picture of 'bureaucratic organisations' given by Weber (1993:110) which depicts impassioned bureaucrats selected on merit, rather than social status, pursuing rational objectives according to law and rules rather than personal preference, organisational studies in public policy have made a number of observations. It has been stressed, for example, that public policy is not so clear cut as to have incontestable objectives (Minogue 1997:15). Moreover, in reply to accusations that a specific policy has not worked to solve the social problem it was meant to tackle, it has been pointed out that social policies may in practice pursue conflicting or ambiguous objectives, or be based on an insufficient understanding of the problems they are meant to address (Elmore 1997:241). However, policy failure is often conveniently blamed on administrators subverting or recreating policy, without an examination of the constraints and contexts in which they have to work (Lipsky 1980; 1981).

In attempting to identify and hypothesise the ways in which the organisational constraints, goals and incentive structures that the administrators work in might affect their discretionary decision making, the following section of the chapter draws on four theoretical models outlined by Elmore (1997) in relation to public policy and the problem of implementation. Essentially, the models differ in the degree to which they espouse reliance on hierarchical control and narrowing low level discretion. Such models however, are open to the claim that they give prominence to the organisation. Pollit (1997:333) makes the point that in reifying the organisation, less attention is paid to the values of the workers which provide fuel for the whole decision making process. In a bid to overcome this false separation of the public/private realm, Sims et al

(1993:209) argue for a shift from the notion of organisation to organising. Organising is something they consider as a social, meaning making process. They thus focus on the raw materials of organising: people, their beliefs, actions, feelings and shared meanings (Sims et al 1993:9).

The first model outlined by Elmore (1997) is the 'systems management model'. Here, responsibility for policy making and overall performance is seen better to rest with top management, which in turn allocates specific tasks and performance objectives to subordinate units and monitors their performance (Elmore 1997: 248). In this view implementation consists of defining a detailed set of objectives that accurately reflect the intent of a given policy, and assigning responsibilities and standards of performance to sub-units consistent with these objectives. 'Bad management' is often given as a reason for implementation failure. The maximisation of outputs and efficiency is pursued through standard Taylorist recipes: fragmentation, standardisation and control, and is often thought to be suited to large bureaucratic organisations handling large amounts of routine information (Sims et al 1993: 98).

The major utility of the systems management model is that it directs our attention toward the mechanisms that policy makers and high level administrators have for structuring and controlling the behaviour of subordinates. Indeed Elmore (1997:246) argues that a great deal of behaviour in organisations can be explained by examining devices of control and compliance: strict rules, targets and budgetary constraints for example. The aim of strict rules is essentially to enable the control of the workers by the

organisation: rules are a means to enhance the ends of the organisation and employees follow them because they are rational. Furthermore, rules can be argued to be impartial, allowing the employee to hide behind them when giving a contentious decision that a client does not like (Sims et al 1993: 25).

However, as Sims et al (1993:7) point out, tight mechanisms of control (rules, targets and capped budgets) in and of themselves need not secure the normative or moral acquiescence of the workers. Workers may experience control as oppressive, but resentfully do what is expected of them because they are unwilling to suffer the consequences. Given the opportunity, rules may be bent or broken by officials where they do not accord with their personal values, or in order to meet demand. Thus, rules do not blindly control our behaviour in organisations. They permit different interpretations and their enforcement becomes tied in with the culture of organisational life (Sims 1993: 33).

The above 'systems management' model is therefore argued to be unrealistic as it conceives of too much of a mechanical 'top to bottom' view of policy implementation. The second model: the bureaucratic process model, in part takes account of the criticism levied at the first. This essentially represents the sociological view of organisations, and is exemplified by studies of street-level bureaucracy. Here, the two essential features of organisations are said to be routine and discretion and the interaction between them. As well as the means by which high level administrators attempt to structure the behaviour of street level bureaucrats, in this view one of the major concerns of the front-line worker is learning to cope with the immediate pressures of the

job (Elmore 1997:250). Such pressures include inadequate resources, inadequate information, lack of time and ambiguous objectives. Research in this vein is interested in tracing the effect of lower-level discretion and routinised behaviour on the execution of policy and illustrates how the workers use their discretion to reinterpret policy in response to their constraints (Lipsky 1980; 1981; Prottas 1979).

This model highlights that whilst street-level bureaucrats occupy the most critical position in the policy delivery process, their working conditions are seldom conducive to the adequate performance of their jobs. More often than not they find themselves in situations where they lack the organisational and personal resources; where they are exposed to psychological or physical threat and where there are conflicting and ambiguous expectations about how they ought to perform their work (Lipsky 1980:197-8). Whilst they may be responsible for a large number of clients that they are supposed to deal with on an individual basis, learning to cope with the stresses of service delivery means learning to rely on simple, standardised sources of information about clients, and developing a facility for classifying and labelling people simply and quickly. The latter become coping mechanisms for having inadequate resources on the one hand and a high demand for services on the other.

The prevailing theories of organisational behaviour represented by the systems management and bureaucratic process models are argued to encourage and perpetuate a tacit assumption that low-level administrators are incapable of making independent judgements and decisions. However,

Elmore (1997:255) argues that this view is becoming increasingly difficult to defend as the workforce becomes more professionalised and better-educated.

One organisational model that does consider the administrator as capable of independent judgements and which is also said to recognise the needs of the individual within the demands of the organisation is a combination of sociological and psychological theory: implementation as organisational development. Essentially, from this perspective, organisations should function to satisfy the basic psychological and social needs of the individuals within them: for autonomy and control over their own work, for participation in decisions that affect them, and for commitment to the purposes of the organisation. Sims et al (1993:34) argue that management thinking about rules and procedures is changing and that flexibility and initiative – to respond in an enterprising way - are the current fashion to cope with a changing environment. The focus here then is on unleashing human potential and creativity rather than constraining it through rules and regulations: 'empowerment' has replaced control as a management buzzword (Sims et al 1993:34).

From this viewpoint, the implementation process is necessarily one of consensus building and accommodation between policy makers and implementers. The central problem of implementation here is not whether implementers conform to prescribed policy but whether the implementation process results in consensus in goals, individual autonomy, and commitment to policy on the part of those who must carry it out. Ultimately however, the goal of control over staff is the same, but the ethos is that democratic

organisations are more efficient ones (Elmore 1997:259). Such organisations must essentially rely on training, trust and strong shared values to ensure co-ordination and control.

We might hypothesise then that control over administrators will be less contested where they feel 'empowered' to do something they perceive as meaningful and at the same time meet their specified organisational goals - or where the organisational goals and working practices accord with their values. Those who feel powerless, on the other hand, tightly controlled (by rules, targets and budgets) and forced to act against their wills might be more concerned to try and thwart the goals of the organisation, especially where such goals do not accord with their personal values (Sims et al 1993:110/111).

That said, it is further argued that organisational structures and constraints, especially perhaps where they are extremely tight, are able to affect the morals of people working within them. In other words there are processes in organisations that create their own particular brands of morality, dislocated from the principles by which, privately, organisational members try to live. In order to get their job done therefore, morally aware people can act in ways quite contrary to their expressed values, which can lead to feelings of disquiet or guilt from being party to a possible injustice or harm (Sims et al 1993: 58).

Until recently feelings and emotions were relatively neglected in the literature on organisations. Bureaucracies – stereotypically staffed by Weber's impassioned officials - are no place for doubt or anxiety. Yet, jobs that deal

with human problems and distress are often emotionally demanding. Whilst people may be emotionally affected by their work, they are often expected to exercise emotional control and show a 'stiff upper lip' (Fincham and Rhodes 1992:53) and routinise emotionally disturbing incidents.

The need to express hidden emotions can however spur the growth of informal organisational processes (Fincham and Rhodes 1992:53) like stories and jokes that help to give an indirect voice to inner feelings. Humour and jokes, far from being inconsequential, are important features of organisational life. They break routine and enable people to cope with boring or alienating jobs. Furthermore, they permit the venting of unacceptable views and emotions by offering a moral amnesty that permits the breaking of taboos (Sims 1993:166).

If the workers feel powerless, or a power imbalance, then the stories and jokes may put the 'other' (for example, their clients or superiors) in a bad light. When directed to 'outsiders', jokes strengthen the solidarity of a group and enable the group to score symbolic victories against their psychological adversaries. Where directed at the organisation itself, humour undermines the façade of rationality and seriousness of the organisation (Sims et al 1993:167). Derogatory humour then, can be a coping mechanism. It might be hypothesised however, that the use of such 'off stage' coping mechanisms might be influenced both by the educational and occupational background's of the workers on the one hand and the training they receive once recruited into the organisation on the other.

As Elmore (1997:246) notes, the way that people are socialised into organisations (the training they receive) can act as an important, though less obvious, ingredient of control. The difference is that instead of shaping decisions by the use of tight rules and budgets for example, it is the decision-makers who are shaped by their training. Similarly, it might also be hypothesised that the pre-job socialisation (for example professional values and beliefs) that the administrators bring to the organisation will also be important (Feldman 1992:176; Pollit 1997:331) especially where this differs significantly in the two countries under study.

Professionals or bureaucrats?

Professional training (in some form of social welfare, for example social work), or indeed, the lack of it might be thought to have some influence both on decision making about need and how staff think about poverty and those who are poor. As Hill (1997:206) notes, 'the presence of professionals in bureaucracy can make some difference to the ways in which policy is implemented'. Essentially the discretion wielded by a professional in comparison to a bureaucrat will be guided and informed more by their accrued knowledge and 'expertise' rather than bureaucratic rules. Thus, the training brought to (and received in) the job may essentially influence the administrative 'means of judgement' (Sims et al 1993:120). Of course, the latter points are inextricably related to whom the organisation seeks to recruit. Sims et al (1993:35) point out that less overt mechanisms of control, such as selection procedures (outlined in the following chapter) aimed at ensuring highly committed staff is currently one of the much-favoured mechanisms.

Everyone has personal idiosyncratic theories of personality: what we consider good and bad traits in people and how we make judgements about them. But, in organisations they often have to be more formal, more systemised and more 'objective'. Organisations are places where perceptions and the judgements that are based on them can have a crucial impact on people's lives (Sims et al 1993:122): in this case for those asking for an exceptional payment. In the latter respect, we might hypothesise that a lack of social welfare related training or a background in bureaucratic administration would leave more room for 'common sense' notions of poverty and its causes.

Moreover, we may find that the professional might be more powerful than the non-professional (Adler and Asquith 1981:13). For example, expertise can often legitimate the use of discretion: administrators of discretionary decisions are not political, but professional (Baldwin 1997:374). In comparison with a professional, who may have been socialised into a professional ideology through long periods of training, a bureaucrat is often an official who has been assigned to an administrative task. Thus, we might expect a professional to 'have a considerably greater personal commitment to an ideology of welfare' than a bureaucrat (Adler and Asquith 1981:15).

We might also hypothesise that any differences in the latter respect in the two systems under study might have consequences for how rewarding or enjoyable administrators consider their jobs to be. The professional may view 'difficult clients' with multiple problems as a 'challenge' for example, whereas bureaucrats, lacking a comparable professional training might consider such challenges as 'something to be put up with'. Any such differences might

manifest themselves in their intrinsic orientation to work, affecting whether the main motivation is the interest and variety of the work on the one hand or more instrumental (to earn money) on the other (Sims et al 1993: 213; Clarke and Wilson 1961; Tullock 1997). Increasingly, Sims et al (1993:96) argue, the meaning of work in a consumer culture is for money, and perhaps for fringe benefits like occupational pensions and flexible working hours.

Rather than assuming therefore, as Lipsky (1980:xii) seems to, that those who work in public services seek out their occupations because they want to perform a worthwhile role in society, we should perhaps empirically explore administrative routes and motivations to employment (Peters 1985:89). Such motivations, along with their organisational goals and structures might be expected to affect staff attitudes, performance and dispositions towards those they make discretionary decisions about (Peters 1985:74; Prottas 1979:116/117).

Discretion

Hawkins (1992:11) defines discretion as the means by which law – the most consequential normative system in a society – is translated into action. Given that the form such action takes may not necessarily be predictable from the scrutiny of legal rules, discretion is effectively best conceptualised as the space ‘between legal rules in which legal actors may exercise choice’ Hawkins (1992:11).

Discretion in public policy has many uses (Hawkins 1992). In the case of exceptional payments, discretion has been argued to be a means of

responding flexibly to the unforeseen and individualised needs of those who are poor (Titmuss 1971). Rules, for Titmuss (1971) could never pre-empt the full range of human needs, and thus the key defect of rules in the field of welfare administration was their slowness to respond to rapidly changing human needs and circumstances. However, discretion in public policy is not without its critics. Whilst, as seen, some theorists argue that discretion is an inescapable feature of the street-level bureaucrat's job, discretionary payments to those who are poor have attracted special criticism when compared to those that are often considered to be granted on 'rights' criteria.

Introducing or increasing discretion in the area of income maintenance can also be a way for central government to ration or cut back on expenditure¹³ (discussed further in chapter 3). Devolving financial responsibility to the field officer can be a means of deflecting attention away from those at the top, who then escape from dealing with contentious issues of detail, such as the determination of special needs payments (Mabbett and Bolderson 1998:7).

Those who would conceptualise the implementation of public policy as akin to a 'transmission belt' would further argue that the 'rule of law' is threatened by vague, general or ambiguous statutes for discretion (Baldwin 1997:374). Discretionary decision making it is argued, can result in unfair and arbitrary decisions (Adler and Asquith 1981:9) and are open to the biases and personal prejudices of officials¹⁴, not least because of the different power relations

¹³ It is recognised that increasing discretion can also increase expenditure.

¹⁴ This argument stands from both the political right and left. The former feared that more administrative discretion would mean more 'socialistic ideals'; more benefits for the 'undeserving', and the latter argued that rights to benefits were preferable to the discretionary choices of 'government moralisers and social controllers' (Titmuss 1971: 115).

inherent between those who make decisions and those who are affected by them.

Whether professional or bureaucratic discretion is employed however, charges of 'arbitrary' discretionary decisions have been argued to be a myth. The exercise of discretion by legal officials is said to be far from unpredictable, rather it is argued to follow clear and specific principles and be remarkably patterned and consistent (Baumgartner 1992:129). Close investigation often reveals that a rational process is at work: aggregate patterns of discretionary behaviour are clear (Baldwin 1997:369). Again, in relation to the present research, discretionary patterns in the two countries might be expected to be influenced by the organisational goals and contexts in which workers operate: which will effectively present themselves as 'horizons of possibilities' (Emerson and Paley 1992:246).

The chapter now moves on to consider the specific theories and concepts that might be important in understanding and explaining the aggregate patterns of behaviour of those who implement discretionary payments in the two countries. In particular, the social characteristics of those they make decisions about are said to be particularly relevant (Baumgartner 1992:130). Hawkins (1992:43) argues that assessments of moral character made by legal decision-makers are one of the most pervasive and persistent features in shaping the exercise of discretion. Essentially any such assessments would perhaps be underpinned by their values and beliefs concerning poverty and poor people.

Perceptions of poverty

Two opposing, dominant moral systems are commonly used or evoked to understand welfare recipients that are closely related to the earlier discussion on ideologies of 'workfare'. The first considers claimants as morally deficient, especially in lacking a work ethic. The second views recipients as suffering from 'human capital' and environmental deficits, such as lack of education and training, or lack of access to job opportunities (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996: 239).

Several studies of local social security offices cited by Berthoud and Dalley (1992:95) have found a staff culture in the UK in which claims of hardship from claimants have been viewed with suspicion. Officials in the Single Payment scheme, as was in the UK, were anxious at their inability to apply discretionary judgements to each claim and were also concerned that claimants 'knew too much about the rules' and were thus in a position to abuse the scheme (Berthoud and Dalley 1992:7).¹⁵ Howe (1985:50) reports similar observations from a local office that dealt with exceptional need payments. Many officers argued that claimants tried to 'get out of it as much as possible'. Comments such as 'you get to hear the same old sob stories over and over again.. .. You just get used to them' or 'that was a good story' were not infrequent (Howe 1985:60). Research into the Social Fund has replicated these findings - several Social Fund Officers thought that there was always a small group who took advantage of the Social Fund system. One

¹⁵ Even though one of the Government's reasons for reform was that it was too complicated to understand.

officer talked of a 'jungle telephone' spreading news around local housing estates as to what could or could not be claimed (Berthoud and Dalley 1992:67).

Howe (1985:62) argues that he does not wish to imply that staff in the office he observed were any more ill-disposed to claimants than other sections of society. The culture he observed endorsed wider social values and attitudes concerning poor relief and distinctions were thus made between the 'deserving and undeserving poor'. Hall and Taylor (1996: 949) argue in this respect that organisations may embrace specific practices because they are valued within a broader cultural environment, even if these practices are dysfunctional in meeting the formal aims or goals of the organisation. Administrators might thus be found to employ a 'logic of social appropriateness, rather than a logic of instrumentality' (Hall and Taylor 1996:949).

In this respect, comparative research on public opinion found that the causes of poverty in the UK are more readily attributable to 'laziness and a lack of willpower' (Alcock 1997:22). In the Netherlands conversely, it is argued that 'the prevailing culture views dependency on benefits as a result of societal process rather than on personal failure or deviancy (Ditch et al 1997:39). Muffels and Fouarge (2000:19) cite data on public perceptions of the causes of poverty in the Netherlands from the 1993 Eurobarometer. The top five perceptions of the causes of poverty given were 'long-term unemployment (47.2%), drug abuse, alcoholism, social welfare cuts and lack of community

spirit. 'Free choice to be like this' (7.8%) ranked at number 9 and 'lazy' (5.9%) at number 10.

Notwithstanding these differences in the perceptions of the causes of poverty across the two countries, it might further be hypothesised that discretionary decision making would in effect compel the respective administrators to distinguish, in some sense, between deserving and undeserving applicants for payment (Handler and Hollingsworth 1971:36), especially in the context of a limited budget (Ham and Hill 1993:170).

The deserving and the undeserving poor.

Cash transfers via social security attract more controversy than any other area of welfare state provision. This is essentially because of the distinction that can be made between giving people 'cash' – which offers a degree of freedom for the beneficiary - and giving people services and goods in kind (Fitzpatrick 2003:330; Jones 1985:103). Whilst in kind services, like health and education for example, generate debate and disagreement, they are not subject to the same level of 'normative and prescriptive commentary' (Fitzpatrick 2003:330). The degree of freedom that cash benefits offer is said to demand a degree of self-responsibility (Fitzpatrick 2003:330) and it is argued that the administration of social security benefits has as much to do with controlling the behaviour of those who are poor, as it does with meeting need (Townsend 1979:823/4). Social security, whilst providing much needed resources to those without means, is inextricably linked with disciplining labour in capitalist western societies in which the wage relation plays a central

part. Several writers have therefore noted the way that social security acts as a form of regulation or social control (Piven and Cloward 1971; Dean 1991; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Higgins 1980).

Such arguments in respect of social assistance often draw on historical links to the Poor Law, under which poverty was viewed as a 'crime', and the function of social welfare became very much a question of control and management (Abrahamson 1999:396). In the implementation of discretionary payments within social assistance, administrative attempts at social control could take many forms. We may hypothesise that administrators will imbue the forms of payment - loans and grants - at their disposal with particular meanings. For example, where their discretion allows, administrators may advocate that the applicant receives the 'less attractive' form of payment (Higgins 1980:4) or constructively deny the existence of need.

Social security primarily separates those who do work from those who do not. Within the latter group however, distinctions are also made between the deserving and the undeserving poor. In relation to discretionary payments, where applicants must justify their exceptional request, such distinctions might be especially pertinent since, as Ignatieff (1894:34) argues, 'the demand that the poor give reasons' for their need 'is the demand that they show themselves deserving'. Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:20) argue that the terms 'deserving and undeserving poor' encompass many characteristics. However, the authors contend that the core concept is whether or not the applicant is morally excused from work. If the person is considered morally deviant in the latter respect, then the policy or administrative response will be one of social

control; the administrator will seek to modify what society considers to be inappropriate behaviour. On the other hand if the person is considered to be morally excused from paid labour participation then misery will be relieved (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:20).

Cook (1979:173) further suggests that the 'assumption is that the 'deserving poor' can be separated from the 'undeserving' according to whether or not the individual caused their own plight'. One of the most important questions then becomes 'what is the cause of the distress' for which the applicant seeks relief? Therefore the separation of the deserving and undeserving poor centres on whether or not the applicant is considered able to work. Accordingly, in theory, it is the 'impotent poor' who will be considered deserving. Aged, sick/infirm people and children constitute the categories morally excused from work and hence considered faultless of blame in their situation of distress. Conversely, the undeserving, or those that might have caused their own distress are able-bodied applicants of relief who are not morally excused from work: 'unemployed people, idle paupers and those capable of work' (Van Oorschot 2000:35; Golding and Middleton 1982:10).

Related to this hypothesised focus on those perceived by administrators as capable, but unwilling to work, we should also consider the argument that in a 'consumer society' those who are poor are argued to be defined not by their

production status, but by their status of inadequate consumers (Bauman 1998).¹⁶ However, in the realm of exceptional payment administration, social assistance beneficiaries might first and foremost be considered by the two sets of administrators as what we might call 'inadequate producers' whose consumption choices should therefore be regulated. There might thus be complex administrative links between what are argued to be two of the most important cultural goals of western societies, production and consumption (Engbersen 1989).

Recently, van Oorschot (2000) has drawn on and amalgamated previous writings to construct a theoretical model of dimensions or criteria of deservingness. The usefulness of the model for the present research centres on its relatively comprehensive nature: outlining many of the hypothesised distinctions and concepts that might be used by administrators in their daily jobs.

The first dimension is that of control. What is the applicants control over their neediness, or their responsibility for their plight? The less control they are seen to have over their situation the more deserving they will be of support (Van Oorschot 2000:36; Cook 1979: 37/38). The second criterion concerns the level of need: the greater intensity of a person's need seems to result in a

¹⁶ Williams (2002:208) highlights that having to use second hand shops or the cheapest stores is particularly painful for poor, or socially excluded people who feel that they have 'no choice' but to use, what they perceived as inferior channels, outwith the mainstream of consumption enjoyed by the majority.

greater probability that they will be helped (Cook 1979:37). The identity of the poor, or the closer to 'us' they are thought to be, constitutes the third criterion for judging those more deserving of support. The fourth dimension is concerned with the attitude of the poor towards support; their expressed docility or gratefulness: the more compliant the more deserving. Reciprocity, arguably one of the most pervasive societal norms (Goodin 2002; Gouldner 1960) is the final criterion of deservingness offered by the theoretical model. Is the applicant thought to have 'earned' support; the more reciprocation the more deserving they will be of help (Van Oorschot 2000:36). Reciprocation can take the form of a smile, thanks or willingness to comply with a labour market reinsertion programme. Concomitantly a perceived lack of reciprocation may effectively exclude clients from being helped (Komter 1996).

Research has found that people of working age with no children are the group most likely to be refused a payment from the Social Fund (Ditch 1995:343). In the Netherlands conversely, it has been suggested that recent policy changes (the move from 'care' to self-sufficiency – and hence 'work' along with the introduction of capped budgets – discussed fully in chapter 3) may see those households with the best chances on the labour market win out over the long-term unemployed (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993).

Comparatively speaking therefore, there might be variation in the discretionary payment schemes under study in regards both to the policy aims and administrative perceptions of deserving and undeserving beneficiaries. Given the different emphasis in the balance between cash and care in this

area of income maintenance in the two countries moreover, there may also be differences in the degree to which administrators are explicitly able to modify what they consider to be 'inappropriate behaviour'. Essentially, this would imply that the discretionary decisions, if not the value judgements, that the two sets of workers make regarding the needs of social assistance beneficiaries might be dependent on different configurations of social assistance outlined above.

Need

Given that staff are obliged to justify decisions, the administration of discretionary social assistance payments necessarily involves a determination of need. Despite, or perhaps because of, its obvious importance to social policy, there is no agreed political or academic definition about the nature of human need and the concept of need is not often explicated in empirical research in social policy (Smith 1980; but see Huby and Dix 1992 in relation to need and the Social Fund)).

Scholars and philosophers have sought to clarify and separate needs from wants or desires, to find a universal concept of human need (Doyle and Gough 1991) and to argue for a new 'modern' language of need (Ignatieff 1984). Essentially, discussion centres on what it is that makes us human, and therefore what we need, and what welfare should provide in order for us to avoid harm. In income maintenance, these debates are closely related to whether poverty is conceptualised in either absolute or relative terms and are said to influence the benefit levels in welfare states accordingly.

Absolute conceptualisations of poverty mostly concern defining human needs as needs for subsistence. Given that these are universal they are often argued to be the only 'objective' human needs that can be identified and spoken of. 'Wants' on the other hand are, from this viewpoint, seen as arising from individual or personal choice.

Writers such as Townsend (1979) argue that poverty is relative to the time period and society in which someone lives and would stress that humans have needs for more than mere physical survival. They also need to feel part of the wider society in which they live. Therefore benefit levels should be adequate for social participation. Ignatieff (1990:34/35) argues for instance, that levels of assistance that meet the most basic needs of those on social assistance (for food, shelter and clothing) do not necessarily fulfil the individual's 'social needs' or their needs to flourish as human beings.

Whilst, as Bradshaw (1972) implies, 'normative' definitions of need employed by administrators may in practice bear little relation to those constructed by scholars and philosophers, he does assert that they 'may be different according to the value orientation' (1972:641) of, in this case, the two sets of administrators.

From the earlier discussion concerning the relative levels of social assistance in the two systems under study, a very obvious hypothesis would be that those working within the comparatively generous Dutch system would have more recourse to conceptions of relative need, whilst the UK workers would operate more along the lines of 'liberal' and absolute principles. We might

argue that, the Dutch level of assistance, which define a level of common need which includes amounts for holidays, can be distinguished in this respect from a level of need associated with deservingness or less eligibility in the UK.

That said, administrative perceptions of relative need might in practice lead to conservative decisions by administrators (Ignatieff 1984). For example, Ignatieff (1984) points to the differences in the 'respect' that might be due to the social positions of the king and the beggar. Ultimately, administrators are essentially considering the needs of those who occupy the social position of being reliant on social assistance benefits, which might be the starting position for any discretionary judgement.

In this vein, Sen (1983:153) argues that, while the relative view of poverty has its merits, ultimately, poverty is an absolute notion. There is an irreducible absolutist core in the idea of poverty (Sen 1983:159). The poor are deprived in an absolute sense in their capabilities, and this will then manifest itself in, and will relate to, their relative deprivation in terms of commodities, incomes and resources. Sen (1983:159) illustrates his argument by quoting Adam Smith's discussion of 'necessaries': 'by necessaries I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but what ever the custom of the country renders it indecent for credible people, even the lowest order, to be without ... Custom .. has rendered leather shoes a necessary of life in England. The poorest creditable person of either sex would be ashamed to appear in public without them'.

The usefulness of Smiths' view for Sen is that Smith does not even pose the 'relative' notion of poverty or need. The 'poorest credible person' does not 'need' the leather shoes in order to feel (relatively) less ashamed than everyone else, they need them in order not to feel ashamed at all, which, as Sen (1983:159) points out, in its achievement is an absolute one. Sen (1983: 161) argues that relative notions of poverty sit entirely within his definition. The commodities and resources needed for the absolute notion of capabilities will vary over time and across societies.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature relevant to identifying the factors that might affect the decision-making frameworks of those who implement discretionary payments in Britain and the Netherlands. Administrators were argued to be situated in differing welfare regimes with different ideological underpinnings. Concomitantly, it was hypothesised that the role of the state in income maintenance expressed in both the relative salience and generosity of means-tested benefits would affect not only the politically defined, but also the administratively perceived needs that can be met by exceptional payments. Social assistance provision is concerned with provision for 'the poor' in the UK whilst benefit levels were set at an amount that included holidays in the Netherlands. It was further argued however, that, whilst useful for general hypotheses, a more detailed lens was needed for hypothesising how the particular social assistance schemes might inform discretionary decision-making on the exceptional needs of beneficiaries.

Typologies of social assistance highlighted that, whilst the historical origins and traditions of cash and/or care are quite distinct in the two countries under study, contentions have been forwarded for their recent convergence to what we might call paternalistic social assistance 'workfare' schemes. These are said to have strengthened the cash and care tradition in the Netherlands and reintroduced it in the UK. However, the chapter argued that such contentions have ignored the degree to which exceptional payments were integrated into such provision, and it was hypothesised that such differences would result in empirically observed cross-national diversity.

Specifically, such social assistance contexts might be expected to structure the degree to which the two sets of administrators aim to change an applicant's behaviour in return for a discretionary payment. It was further hypothesised that the structure and constraints of their respective 'people changing/processing' organisations, as well as the personal resources that staff bring to their jobs would influence their respective constructions of deserving and undeserving beneficiaries. In sum, this empirical research is expected to demonstrate that 'need' is a dynamic social construct, the cross-national construction of which is dependant on the professionalism of the workers, the ideology of the programme they implement and the organisational structure (and constraints) of the bureaucracy in which they operate (Smith 1980:55).

In order to situate the two sets of workers in their particular local contexts, the following chapter considers policy origins, development and aims of

exceptional need provision within social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands.

Chapter 3 Policy context

As the previous chapter argued, the construction and perception of need utilised by administrators of discretionary payments will be influenced by the configuration of social assistance and the related organisational contexts, constraints and goals which these generate for those working within them. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the origins, development and context of social assistance and exceptional need provision (as it was at the time of research) in Britain and the Netherlands.

After providing a conceptual definition of exceptional need payments within social assistance, the first part of the chapter outlines the historical origins for meeting the one-off needs of social assistance beneficiaries in both countries under study. Following Lødemel (1997), the chapter argues that the origins of a national and comprehensive income maintenance system in both countries meant that initial social assistance provision retained more links with 'care' and social work in the Netherlands whilst Britain conversely, can be seen to have initiated a separation of 'cash and care'.

The second part of the chapter illustrates that the subsequent development of policy has centred around the thematic concerns of standardisation, uniformity and the associated rigidity in provision on the one hand, and the exercise of discretion and claims of inequity on the other. Comparatively speaking however, there are significant differences regarding the actors involved in resolving such debates within social assistance depending on the role of the (local/central) state in provision. In the Netherlands the dialogue takes place

between central and local government, and can essentially be considered as a representation of a struggle for the definition of need between them. In the UK's more centralised governmental system on the other hand, the moves to and from standardisation and discretion in this area of provision is more about cost containment and equity amongst claimants.

Differences and similarities are further illustrated in the period of development leading up to the exceptional need systems as they were at the time of research. Changing economic climates and government ideologies in the 1980s can be seen to have initiated fundamental changes in both the administration and aims of social security and social assistance in both countries. Whilst, broadly speaking, this led to decentralised, budget limited and discretionary exceptional need schemes, differences in the state structures meant that at the level of administration, the Dutch exceptional need scheme *Bijzondere Bijstand* was firmly situated within an 'activity fare' social assistance whilst the British Social Fund primarily remained separated from the development of a wider 'welfare to work' policy.

Drawing on theoretical propositions outlined in chapter 2, by situating the administrators of exceptional payments in their specific social assistance configurations and organisational contexts, part four of the chapter highlights that the Dutch administrators might be hypothesised to be paternalistic 'people changers', and the British officers managerial 'people processors'. Such factors will be expected to inform frames of reference for the award of discretionary payments and inform the findings presented in chapters four to eight of the thesis.

Before moving on to address the origins of social assistance in Britain and the Netherlands, the chapter begins with a conceptual definition of exceptional payments that will be utilised for comparative purposes.

Defining exceptional need payments

Exceptional payments within social assistance schemes are defined as 'lump sums of money which are made available to some people in need to help them cope with exceptional and sometimes unexpected expenses' (Ditch 1995:338). We might see this definition then, as referring to a need arising from a specific event, situation or life transition, in which people lack the financial resources necessary to meet it in a capitalist society based on the cash-nexus of exchange. Unforeseen events or significant transitions that result in material need arise in all families.¹ However where the individual or family in question lives on the social minimum of last resort social assistance, without friends or family in a position to assist them financially, such instances may be all the more stressful (Ditch 1995:338).

The situations and circumstances in which these needs occur are as varied as the human condition, but may include expenses associated with the birth of a child; the death of an immediate family member; separating from a (violent) partner; the breakdown of a relatively expensive household item like a cooker or a washing machine; visiting sick relatives in hospital or looking for work. The existence of such provision within social assistance schemes recognises

¹ Hence the fact that those not on social assistance benefit may be eligible for such payments. For example, in times of fire or flood.

that there are certain needs which 'normal' social assistance rates will not be sufficient to meet.

Whilst such schemes represent a relatively small fraction of government expenditure on social assistance the specific position which schemes of this nature occupy is of considerable importance, precisely because they do profess to offer help in situations of extreme financial hardship and personal stress. The extent to which such schemes do relieve need therefore - by providing safeguards for social assistance beneficiaries - may be said to far outweigh their financial cost (Buck and Smith 2003:xiii).

Furthermore, by their inclusion in social assistance schemes, often taken as the *de facto* poverty line, provision is targeted at the most disadvantaged members of society. Such schemes therefore convey strong and significant messages about how that particular society believes the poor should be treated. From a comparative perspective then, such schemes demonstrate 'what we think of the poor': conveyed in the manner in which help is, or is not, made available and the extent to which needs are met, or how generous provision is (Buck and Smith 2003: xiii).

Exceptional needs can be met in kind, or (as in the case of the present research) cash payments can be paid to the beneficiary in the form of loans and grants. Payments given in the form of a loan do not actually represent the principle that such needs are exceptional, i.e. not expected to be met from general social assistance rates. Loans are an 'advance' of social assistance benefit rather than an addition to it. A grant however, is a one-off payment

that the recipient does not have to pay back. From a comparative perspective then, the costs and situations for which payments are made as either a loan or a grant might be particularly illuminating. Partly in recognition of the diverse and unforeseen circumstances in which human needs might arise provision is often - to differing degrees - administered on a discretionary basis.²

As the previous chapter argued, exceptional need provision must be understood in the context of the social assistance scheme in which it is situated. In order to contextualise both the development leading to, and the nature of, provision in Britain and the Netherlands as it was at the time of the research therefore, the following section of the chapter considers the origins of social assistance in both countries. It illustrates that the differences highlighted in each country's route to breaking down the Poor Law and on a more general level their establishment of national income maintenance programmes might well have influenced the nature of the social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands (Lødemel 1997).

Origins: journeys to the last resort of social assistance

Poor Law provision in many European countries was based on the principle that paupers could only call for help from the authorities if their families would not support them, and if they had been refused help by churches and charities (Eardley et al 1996: 274b). The British Poor Law of 1834 or the Dutch *Armenwet* (Poor Law) of 1854 moreover, further distinguished between those categories of poor people who were seen to be deserving of relief: the

² As stated in chapter 2, devolving discretion for such payments might also be seen as a way to contain expenditure.

'impotent poor', and those who were regarded as undeserving, essentially the unemployed, 'idle paupers' capable of work (Van Oorschot 2000:35).

The emergence of compulsory, national and collective insurance systems against (many of) the major adversities confronting wage earners in a capitalist society which came to supersede Poor Law provision in the 20th Century were established throughout a number of European countries – Britain and the Netherlands included – within a relatively short space of time. But that similarity does not mean that like effects were begotten by like causes, or that differences - in relation to time spans for our purposes - are unimportant (De Swaan 1988: 153) for their impact on the origins of social assistance provision.

Points of historical divergence become significant essentially because they represent important variables according to which social assistance schemes currently differ between welfare states in general. As the last chapter highlighted, 'remembering that all assistance systems are descended from 19th century poor relief arrangements, the obvious distinction to draw here is between those systems which have remained localised (and cash/care multifunctional) and those – like Britain, which have been centralised and divorced from anything other than a cash relief function' (Jones 1985:113/4).

As seen in the previous chapter, Lødemel (1997) argues that Norwegian social assistance belongs to a comprehensive and generous social democratic welfare state, but social assistance retains more links with the Poor Law than its British counterpart. He unravels this paradox by explaining

that Norway established comprehensive social insurance schemes covering workers for the major risk contingencies in a piecemeal fashion whilst maintaining and reforming the Poor Law 'from within' which continued with the tradition of a localised service combining cash and care. The later establishment of Norwegian social assistance is then influenced by the remaining 'problem' or 'residuum' client groups who are not covered by some form of insurance benefit.

Britain, on the other hand, departed from this path, and indeed the path taken by all other western welfare states (Lødemel 1997:208) by abolishing the Poor Law and replacing it with a strictly income-maintenance oriented national social insurance and social assistance scheme in the space of a few years (Lødemel 1997:205) and handing over social work functions to the local authorities. Given this distinctive path taken by Britain in the abolition of its Poor Law from 'without', we would expect to find similarities between Norway and the Netherlands. Specifically, we may find that the Netherlands may also have established social insurance schemes covering most workers before they constructed a national social assistance scheme which will then be influenced by existing municipal provision for those whose risks are not already covered by some form of insurance benefit.

From the Poor Law to social assistance: Britain

Prior to 1934, supplementary help to those who were destitute had been the responsibility of local authorities broadly under the provisions of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act – intended to limit the scope of 'parish' help and to make dependence on it as unattractive as possible – with the ultimate threat

of incarceration in the 'workhouse'. A major problem for the central state under this system was the variability with which local authorities interpreted their provisions. Some left leaning authorities for example provided relatively generous help to the poor (Craig 2003:3).

The highly centralised nature of the UK state has influenced the development of a national system of social security³ (Eardley et al 1996b:388/89), and the history of exceptional need payments in the UK can be traced back to the first national scheme for social assistance, the Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB) which was established in 1934 (Walker 1993:99). This has been described as an 'arms length organisation supervised by government', concerned with rationalisation and disciplining labour (Craig 2003:4). In 1941, the Assistance Board (AB) replaced the UAB. Noticeably in this time period the ideology of desert was temporarily removed, attributed by Craig (2003:4), to the social context of the Second World War and the fact that it was not only those in 'obvious poverty' who turned to the state for assistance.

Following the end of the war Britain established a nationalised and (whilst flat rate and low) comprehensive system of social insurance (1946), adopted from the Beveridge report. In 1948 further legislation established a national system of means tested National Assistance. The 1948 Act may have abolished the 'hated and localised Poor Law' (Jones 1985:114) however the actual provisions and eligibility criteria for National Assistance were little different (Craig 2003:4). National Assistance was administered by the National

³ Notwithstanding the recent devolved powers to governmental tiers in Wales and Scotland social security is still a reserved matter for the Westminster Parliament.

Assistance Board (NAB) which had some degree of control on how the system was administered and in policy formulation, for instance in what circumstances weekly or lump-sum payments could be made (Walker 1993:7).

In relation to means tested social assistance, the important point for our purposes is that Beveridge stressed the initial importance of such provision in 'a considerable number of cases', during the build up towards subsistence level insurance based benefits (Lødemel 1997:206). Having served this interim role, it was envisaged that social assistance would subsequently take on a limited role within social security, covering those with no access to insurance benefits, those with 'abnormal' (in respect of diet or care for example) needs and those (presumably women) who were in need due to desertion or separation (Lødemel 1997:206) and for whom no form of insurance benefit existed.

With the nationalisation of assistance in Britain in 1948 central government were entrusted with paying a weekly income: 'cash' to those people without means, and the provision of social services or 'care' was entrusted to local authorities (Stewart and Stewart 1993:408). Jones (1985:114) notes that divorcing cash relief payments from 'advice or assistance kind' meant that 'those in need of money would not be interfered with on other accounts while those in need of advice or in kind assistance could seek this from local authorities without being made to feel that such was part of a 'poor relief' service'. The enactment of National Assistance therefore resulted in a separation of income maintenance services from other social services in

Britain. This entailed that the administrators of social assistance 'focused exclusively on material problems' in assessing claims for last-resort income maintenance (Lødemel 1997:251).

Throughout the existence of the above schemes, demand for exceptional payments grew significantly, raising one of the key structural issues facing them: the inadequacy of basic social assistance benefit levels (Craig 2003:5). For example, Walker (1993:100) highlights that the number of claims for lump sum payments trebled between 1948 and 1965 from 100,000 to 345,000. In its final year of existence, the NAB thus argued for a reform of the system in order that basic scale rates be adequate to cover normal needs. Furthermore, despite the intention of constructing a national scheme that would reduce inconsistency in nation-wide provision, reliance on the discretionary judgement of the NAB and its officers meant that 'decisions might be made which were out of line with the government's dominant ideological goals' (Craig 2003:5). Notwithstanding the fact that national social assistance came to play a much wider role in the social security system than Beveridge had initially anticipated the National Assistance scheme established in 1948 ran relatively unchanged until 1966 (Walker 1993:9). These developments in the British system will be discussed further in the chapter, after a brief consideration of the Dutch route to a national and comprehensive social assistance scheme.

From the Poor Law to social assistance: the Netherlands

From the beginning of the 19th Century, Dutch municipalities had gradually assumed responsibility for the care of the poor from private and church organisations as these failed to counter the effects of industrialisation (Van den Brande et al 1994:12). However, local differences that had been much criticised under the old private system were not eliminated, and variability in municipal Poor Law provision remained well into the 1960s.

In comparison to Britain, the Netherlands' history of the construction of a comprehensive and national income maintenance system is one of 'fragmentary and halting legislation' (De Swaan 1988:210) and throughout the relatively piecemeal introduction of national social insurance benefits, the Dutch Poor Laws remain in place.

Commentators on the evolution of the Dutch welfare, or 'caring state'⁴ have outlined the relatively slow and niggardly beginnings on the one hand, and the late but dramatic expansion of a national and comprehensive social security system in the Netherlands on the other (Becker 2000; De Swaan 1988:210; van Kersbergen and Becker 1988). Essentially, the Dutch welfare state is argued to have been a slow starter but a late 'bloomer' because of a conflict about the role and responsibilities of the different interested parties: the state, political parties, unions and employers' associations. This resulted in an impasse for some decades in discussions about the institutional arrangements of the social security system. In the 1950s the interested parties reached a twofold compromise: a corporatist organisation of the social

⁴ To give *Verzorgingsstaat* its most literal translation.

security system and a state-controlled wage policy (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:4).

After this compromise the system expanded rapidly (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:4) and a similar figuration of political forces that had made for such slow and incremental legislation before the Second World War engendered a remarkable expansion of social security (De Swaan 1998:214). In the 1950s and 1960s employment based social insurance and National Insurance were introduced to cover risks associated with unemployment (1952), disability (1967), old age (1957) and widowhood (1959) (Eardley et al 1996b:272). Van der Veen and Trommel (1998:4) point out that that the relatively late extension of the Dutch social security system meant that it was developed in a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity and coverage was universal and the benefits were relatively high. As the previous chapter also highlighted, the introduction of generous, universal, and so called 'passive' benefits can be seen as one way of mediating social and political conflicts which otherwise might result in (the then more) highly pillorised Dutch society (van Kersbergen 1997:314).

During what has been described as a period of 'leftism' in the sixties (Van Kersbergen and Becker 1988:490) the much-criticised local differences in municipal Poor Law provision were considered unacceptable, and the situation that had emerged before and after the war was affirmed when, in 1965, Dutch Poor Law provision was finally abolished with the introduction of the general assistance *Algemene Bijstand* Act. This required municipalities to 'grant assistance to any Dutch national living in or in danger of living in such

circumstances that he (*sic*) does not have the means to support himself' (Eardley et al 1996:274b). This Act was not only an affirmation of public responsibility for the poor but was also an attempt to end the former local diversity in Poor Law provision.

Thus the later establishment of social assistance in the Netherlands – described as the 'crowning piece' topping off the Dutch social security system (Van den Brande et al 1994:12) - and the fact that administration remained a municipal concern can be expected to have influenced the nature of this form of provision. Specifically, by 1965 we can expect that most Dutch workers would be covered by the (relatively generous) insurance benefits established previously. The remaining needs to be met by social assistance then might not have been thought to be purely monetary. This is partly borne out by Van den Brande et al (1994:12) who argue that 'the enactment of the *ABW* has always been considered as a 'monument to decency' and commitment with the weakest in society'. The Christian Democratic ethos being that the strong should help the weak: the Municipal Social Services were very much orientated towards social work, and the 'culture of the Municipal Social Services and their street level bureaucrats was primarily directed at the well being of their clients' (Van den Brande et al 1994:12). In comparison to Britain then, what we see in the origins of the Dutch social assistance scheme is an integration rather than separation of 'cash and care' in national social assistance provision.

Van Oorschot (1998:3) argues that the establishment of a nationally financed Dutch safety net was an expression of the principles of collective

responsibility and solidarity. However, while this form of income maintenance replaced a Poor Law system characterised by diversity and regional differences, we should note that in effect, the implementation of a nationally financed social assistance scheme did not mark a radical departure from the diversity and regional differences that characterised the former Poor Law provision. Municipalities were effectively still free to apply their own means tests and set their own levels of assistance. Significantly, we should note that there was no actual legislative provision for exceptional payments in the Dutch system at this time.

The establishment of national social assistance in Britain and the Netherlands can therefore be seen to differ in respect of whether central or local government administered such schemes and relatedly, whether such income maintenance schemes are separated from social work and 'care'. There are also similarities however (discussed below), in that the continuing discretion and local diversity in this nationally established provision leads policy development in both countries towards standardisation and increased centralisation.

Development of schemes: from discretion to standardisation

This section discusses the development of social assistance and (in the Dutch case the origins of) exceptional payment schemes in Britain and the Netherlands, stopping short of the reforms leading to the provision in place at the time of research: the Social Fund and *Bijzondere Bijstand*. Essentially, there are two major points of comparison in the development of the two systems of provision. The first relates to debates concerning what constitutes

'normal' and 'exceptional' needs. The second point concerns the issue of whether exceptional payments should be discretionary, flexible, but essentially inequitable, or whether they should be standardised, and thereby risk rigidity, effectively denying needs which arise but have not been anticipated or legislated for by policy makers.

In an attempt to find a suitable balance between discretion and standardisation and, more so in the case of Britain, contain expenditure, exceptional need provision in both countries developed by moving from discretion to standardisation. However, the actors involved in the implementation of policy differs between countries and this can be seen to have influenced the paths taken.

Britain: towards entitlement

The development of policy in Britain can be seen as a period in which central governments' major aims were to establish legal rights to social assistance benefit and to reduce the scope of additional payments. As part of a broader reform of social security, in 1966 the NAB was replaced by the Supplementary Benefit Commission (SBC). Like its predecessor the SBC was able to influence both policy formulation and the administration of social assistance (Walker 1993:7). It is also at this time that the administration of social insurance and social assistance benefits was (as Beveridge had initially intended) merged in one government department (Lødemel: 1997:207). The establishment of the SBC partly attempted to deal with those problems that have perpetually been associated with means tested benefits: stigma and low take up (Walker 1993:10). Moreover, Supplementary Benefit was intended to

respond to concerns arising from a growing reliance on discretion (Craig 2003:5) in the NAB, inconsistent and thus inequitable decision making by officers and the administrative cost resulting from the growth in the system of extra payments (weekly and lump sum) (Walker 1993:10).

Craig (2003:5) notes that the 1966 Act stated that people whose resources did not meet their requirements would be entitled to benefit – a move in the direction of legal rights - and weekly benefit was clearly marked out as being for 'normal requirements'. Over and beyond this, the SBC was empowered to pay extra weekly additions for people with on-going needs (e.g. extra heating or a special diet), one-off payments (Exceptional Need Payments) for unusual one-off needs, and payments to people in urgent need (from the result of, for example, a fire or flood). The latter power overrode all others and eligibility was not restricted to those on weekly benefit. This partitioning of need however immediately raised arguments over what were to be regarded as normal requirements, on-going needs and unusual one-off needs (Craig 2003:5).

Between 1968 and 1976 the number of exceptional needs payments grew partly in response to the changing nature of the social assistance clientele. Increasing unemployment saw social assistance claimants below pension age come to outnumber those over pension age (Walker 1993:101). Craig (2003:6) highlights that although the numbers on Supplementary Benefit grew by 11% between 1969 and 1976, the number of Exceptional Need awards grew by 137% for all claimant groups. In 1976 the number of Exceptional

Need Payments topped 1 million for the first time at a cost of £25 million. This growth continued, reaching £34 million in 1979 (Craig 2003:6).

Investigations in the time period highlighted that expenditure primarily went on clothing for adults and children, bedding, removal expenses, furniture, household goods and fuel (Craig 2003:6), items which were in keeping with the SBC discretionary guidelines (Walker 1993:101). However, Craig (2003:6) argues that this pattern of use provoked debate about the boundaries between normal, exceptional and urgent needs, again focusing attention on the adequacy of social assistance scale rates, and thus on the role of one off payments. Moreover, considerable disparity was found between regions, credited to differences not only in levels of deprivation but also to local (welfare rights orientated) organisations highlighting needs. Under-claiming by older people was further highlighted, thought to be because of their perception that the discretionary nature of the payments would lead to them being classed as undeserving. Figures also revealed that whilst most claimants received no more than one exceptional payment a year, a small proportion claimed and received more than one and they did so at a level that was appreciably higher than the average award (Craig 2003:6).

Continuing reliance on discretionary power in the award of exceptional payments in the SBC provoked a 'lively debate' during the 1970s (Walker 1993:101) and also meant that variations in decision making were increasingly open to challenge. Thus Craig (2003:7) attributes the growth of what came to be known as the 'welfare rights industry' during the 1970s to the growing reliance on (and challenges to) discretionary ENPs. Further, the

development of the welfare rights movement at this time impacted on both the aggregate demand for exceptional payments as well as the number of appeals (Walker 1993:104). In 1973 the proportion of ENP appeals reached 28% of the total of the 25,000 SB appeals. Moreover, there was found to be a 50% chance of having the original ENP decision revised, although there were vast differences in the success rates between those appellants who were represented at tribunal and those who were not (Craig 2003:8). The operation of the tribunal system thus raised issues about discretion, fairness, bias and complexity (Craig 2003:8). Refusal of Exceptional Needs Payments were further said to be causing 'boundary disputes' between central and local government: with (local government) social services departments arguing that, in effect, they were providing cash grants for needs which were the responsibility of the SBC (Craig 2003:9).

Throughout the 1970s, the Government became increasingly concerned about the growing costs of the exceptional payment scheme. In an attempt to cut administrative costs, claimants were encouraged to apply by post, staff were discouraged from making house visits and smaller offices were closed or absorbed into larger ones, but costs still grew (Craig 2003:10). Walker (1993:11) argues that this time period also saw a 'growing antagonism towards the social security system and its claimants' by both the tabloid press and various members of parliament. Rhetoric revolved, notes Craig (2003:11), around 'fraud and abuse'. Whilst fraud was depicted as a criminal activity, abuse was couched in terms of 'excessive claiming' mostly as a result of the claimant's own failure to manage their weekly benefit and to spend it on items for which it was intended. Claimants were essentially 'portrayed as living

beyond their means' (Craig 2003:10). Later however, 'abusive claiming' became a phrase used by social security ministers to describe the frequent claiming of one-off payments by a relatively limited number of claimants⁵ (Craig 2003:11).

Largely however, debates about ENPs were conducted in terms of the tensions arising from the competing objectives of equity and entitlement on the one hand, and discretion and flexibility on the other, within the growing government concern to limit the rise in expenditure (Craig 2003:12; Walker 1993:101). In a context of tight public expenditure and increasing demands of ENPs, Craig (2003:12) argues that two advantages of discretion, flexibility and innovation, were lost and discretion was instead effectively used as a means of rationing expenditure. Demand for ENPs continued to grow however, and they increasingly became perceived as, to all intents and purposes, increases in the scale rates of benefit rather than exceptional payments (Craig 2003:12).

The arrival of the Thatcher Government in 1979, and the subsequent Social Security Act of 1980 saw the abolition of the SBC⁶ and responsibility for the administration of Supplementary Benefit transferred to the Department for Health and Social Security (DHSS) (Walker 1993:7). Further, Exceptional Needs Payments were replaced by the Single Payment (SP) Scheme in 1980.

⁵ Even though analysis of data suggest this was marginal through the 1970s and that from the point of view of equity between claimants, a much more significant problem was posed in terms of the low take up overall of ENPs, given that 4 out of 5 claimants were receiving no ENPs at all in an average year throughout the life of the ENP scheme (Craig 2003:11).

⁶ Policy was now to be made by Ministers via Parliament rather than the SBC. At this time the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) was created to advise government on all aspects of social security but not to make policy. Walker (1993:7) notes that SSAC has always been particularly critical of government's social assistance policy.

The government argued that this new scheme would address the structural problems highlighted in earlier provision. The major aim was to reduce discretion in order to simplify the scheme and cut administration costs but, in line with their New Right agenda, not to increase expenditure.

Regulations would set out the range of eligible expenses and the circumstances in which Single Payments would now be allowed. Significantly, Walker (1993:106) notes that the most common expenses for which lump sum payments had been made prior to 1980 were henceforth excluded. Craig (2003:14) argues that the scope of entitlements, and the manner in which they had been drafted as regulations, were essentially intended to limit staff discretion and constrain demand. Eligibility for footwear and clothing – which had constituted more than half of all payments made by the SBC - were tightened and Single Payments would not be given where the need for such items had arisen from normal 'wear and tear' (Walker 1993:106).

However, in practice the Single Payment Scheme still entailed complex regulations and 'disguised discretion' (Craig 2003:17). Whilst payments were meant to be regulated, there was still room for moral judgements (as demonstrated by Howe (1985)). The narrowing eligibility Single Payments entailed once again caused boundary disputes to arise between central government on the one hand and local government and charitable organisations on the other to where demand was argued to have been deflected. As previously however, expenditure on such payments continued to grow reaching £308 million in the mid 1980s (Craig 2003:17).

The Netherlands: discretion within standardisation

From 1965-1974 the Dutch municipalities effectively retained a significant amount of discretion in the provision of national social assistance, by applying their own means tests and deciding on their own levels of assistance. Consequently, large disparities existed in the extent to which Dutch citizens were protected from poverty. In order to combat in 1974 the 'local discretion in amounts paid and the unacceptable inequalities in the rights of Dutch citizens, social assistance became strongly centralised' (Van Oorschot 1998:3). It is only since 1974 therefore that there have been national rules, means tests and standard rates for social assistance, which are common to all 537 municipalities.

These standard rates for the national social minimum⁷ moreover, were set in relation to the Dutch minimum wage (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:17). While such shifts in the responsibility for defining need and the level of provision to meet it can be couched in terms of a desire for 'standardisation', such centralisation has had important implications for the existence, form and role of exceptional need payments in the Netherlands. In particular, while the 1974 Act effectively meant that municipalities lost their freedom to decide the level of social assistance, the legislation also introduced a distinction between general social assistance and 'special' social assistance: *Bijzondere Bijstand*. It is in 1974 then, almost 10 years after the introduction of a nationally financed but until this time, locally set social assistance scheme, that a legal framework for *Bijzondere Bijstand* is

⁷ Again, this might perhaps provide an illustration of, not so much 'how' governments define the minimum income, but rather 'why' they do so. Eardley et al (1996:270) argue that the pillarisation of Dutch politics and society has had the effect of driving up the level of coverage.

introduced. While this can be interpreted as an indication on the part of central government that needs might remain unmet by general and now standardised social assistance rates, the definition of the needy remained within the jurisdiction of the municipalities (*Nota van Toelichting, 1974*)⁸.

This framework for the provision of social assistance and *Bijzondere Bijstand* remained in place for six years until 1980, when a further centralising Act (The National Assistance (Calculation of Additional Benefits) Decree) stipulated the 'criteria for the ability to bear financial loads' or the rules under which decisions on income, assets and means should be taken into consideration when awarding *Bijzondere Bijstand* to people in need (*Nota van Toelichting, 1980*). Effectively then, this legislation introduced standardised means tests common to all municipalities for the administration of *Bijzondere Bijstand* (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:17). In 1984 central legislation introduced a threshold value: no *Bijzondere Bijstand* could be given if the cost of the applicant's need exceeded the costs of the administration to meet it. These very small expenditures were considered to be 'general costs' and therefore excluded (*Nota van Toelichting, 1984*).

With such incremental centralisation and the introduction of more rules however, municipalities started to complain, citing the argument that they could not grant *Bijzondere Bijstand* in accordance with the true individualised needs of every single inhabitant. The administering municipalities increasingly found themselves inflexible in their response to the needs of their

⁸ Explanatory notes to the legislation

inhabitants, whose situations did not comply with the rules of central legislation (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:17).

Given the latter points, it is perhaps not surprising that in the course of the 1980s many Dutch municipalities implemented local income assistance policies.⁹ The timing of these might be considered significant in a wider social security context: nationally prescribed general social assistance rates, and an individualised, and nationally defined criteria for *Bijzondere Bijstand*, alongside a wider economic climate of recession and rising unemployment. It is in these circumstances moreover, that central government takes the austerity measure of freezing the rate of the minimum wage and consequently the levels of social assistance. This climate saw those in long-term unemployment more at risk of poverty. These local assistance policies were not appreciated by the National Government, as they saw them as undermining the national economic policy (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993).

In both countries then, what we see in the development of social assistance is a move from local discretion in nationally financed social assistance provision towards nationally set standardised social assistance rates and increasing uniformity in exceptional provision. As the following section of the chapter highlights, there are also similarities, as well as differences, in the return to discretion in exceptional payment schemes in the two countries.

⁹ Comprising income assistance and exemptions from local taxes for those on a low income.

Returning to discretion in Britain and the Netherlands: 'New Managerialism' and 'Managed Liberalisation'

This section of the chapter is concerned with situating the policy changes leading to the exceptional need schemes within social assistance in both countries under study as they were at the time of research in their wider social and political context. A number of similarities are highlighted: constrained economic environments, the reform of administrative structures, the desire to target those most in need and a return to discretion in the context of capped budgets. Furthermore, increased (work-related) conditionality in the social assistance schemes under study for certain groups can be discerned. However, the degree to which (paternalistic) activation measures were included in the Social Fund and *Bijzondere Bijstand* is shown to differ essentially because such measures 'had to be realised within a matrix of ongoing practises, existing institutions and prior legislation' (De Swaan 1988:157) in both countries.

The Social Fund

In their attempt to 'roll back the state' and concomitantly encourage individual enterprise through lowering taxation, in their second term of office the Conservative Government undertook a major review of one of the largest and fastest growing parts of public expenditure in the UK: the social security system (Clasen 1994:171). In keeping with their ideological beliefs for the role of social security, the policy changes that resulted from the 'Fowler Review' in 1986 were aimed at targeting those most in need, and reducing the role of the

state in the provision of social security (Millar 1994:1).¹⁰ This time period began a process of many cuts to benefits especially with respect to the unemployed (Clasen 1994:179).

Legislation further aimed at a simplification of the social assistance scheme in order to reduce bureaucracy and administration costs. The reforms to emerge from the Fowler Review saw Supplementary Benefit and Exceptional Need Payments replaced with Income Support and the Social Fund. Essentially, Income Support introduced a common basic structure of assessment and payment for means tested benefits. Many of the previous criteria under the former Supplementary Benefit scheme for differentiating weekly payments between different claimants were collapsed into far fewer distinctions, primarily based on age. Additional premiums were to be payable for certain categories of people, for example pensioners and lone parents. The arguments for premiums included simplification and the fact that they were usually paid automatically, rather than having to be claimed separately. The Government also argued that the new structure made it easier to direct additional resources at specific groups (Eardley et al 1996b:412).

The introduction of the Social Fund for meeting the one-off needs of social assistance beneficiaries was arguably one of the most contentious social security reforms enacted in this period, and attracted a plethora of debate, criticism and evaluative research¹¹ (see for example Huby and Dix 1992:2/3;

¹⁰ Policies to encourage private welfare pensions, cutting social insurance benefit eligibility and a greater reliance on means tested benefits were also instigated in this time period (see for example, Evans 1998).

¹¹ In fact, much of the (limited) comparative research on such payments by UK scholars seem to have emerged in this time period (Craig 1992, Tester 1987).

Walker et al 1991). The replacement for the Single Payment Scheme was largely based on discretion, offered predominantly loans, and operated within strict cash limits (see further in the chapter for a fuller description of the Social Fund's objectives at the time of research). From 1988 a distinction was made between certain specified one-off payments which remained a legal right (these were mostly concerned with life course events, birth, death and older age) and most one-off grants and loans, which became discretionary, all paid from the Social Fund (Eardley 1996:392b).

The government argued that the Social Fund was designed to solve the problems that had emerged from earlier schemes: finding the correct balance between discretion and entitlement; solving boundary disputes; containing expenditure; the relationship between essential and exceptional needs, and the role of tribunals in challenging decisions (Craig 2003:21). Regarding the role of tribunals in challenging decisions, Wikeley et al (2002:211) argue that the establishment of the Independent Review Service (IRS) for discretionary Social Fund decisions was intended to insulate the scheme from control outside the Department of Social Security. IRS Inspectors were to be appointed by the Social Fund Commissioner who, in turn, was appointed by the Secretary of State. Thus the right of appeal to an independent tribunal to decisions made by Social Fund Officers had been removed (Huby and Dix 1992:2).

The Social Fund was also designed to tie in with the government's wider 'care in the community' policy: described as a 'health and social services policy developed by conservative governments in the 1980s to encourage people to

enter or remain in the community rather than being taken into residential care' (Wikeley et al 2002:481). Linking a cash grant to health and social service provision in this way was also envisaged to depend in part on a deal of communication between local offices and social work departments, thus 'changing the boundaries between the social security system and the traditional domain of the social work professions' (Wikeley et al 2002:481).

As said, the introduction of Income Support was an attempt to rationalise and simplify the administration of means tested benefits. Income Support was largely to be processed by using computers, whilst the Social Fund would be administered by a separate group of specially trained Civil Servants. Previously, Supplementary Benefit Officers had been responsible for all of the client's income needs, and so what we see here is the effective separation of the administration of the client's regular from their exceptional needs.

In line with their New Right ideological belief in the impact of social security on individual (rational economic) behaviour, the Conservative Government went on to enact a number of changes in the eligibility and generosity of (especially) unemployment benefits in order to improve work incentives (Clasen 1994:174). The structure of implementation in Britain at this time however, has implications for the increasing conditionality in social assistance benefit on work seeking behaviour for some categories of claimants that we

see in 1989 with the 'actively seeking work test', and the later introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance in 1996.¹² Because of different Government Departments and local offices for employment on the one hand and social security on the other¹³, essentially the increased surveillance, sanctions and obligations for the receipt of social assistance benefit that such paternalistic welfare to work policies embody were administered by Employment Officials in Jobcentres¹⁴ – who acted as agents for the (former) Department of Social Security in administering benefit and policing work seeking behaviour - not those who administered Income Support claims or Social Fund Officers in the (then) Department of Social Security.

Managerialism and the 'Next Steps'

The implementation of the Social Fund would have been further affected by the Conservative Government's attack on the bureaucracy of the welfare state and reform of the Civil Service through its 'Next Steps' initiative. Ling (1994:34) argues that the Conservative Government recognised that its New Right project partly depended on its ability to marginalise and undermine the institutional bases of support for the Keynesian welfare state from within: thus public sector professionals and public bureaucrats were especially targeted. It is argued that Thatcher had a personal distaste of (especially senior) civil

¹² In 1996, this separation was further compounded because the unemployed were effectively separated out as a group and put onto Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). This included a means-tested and a contributory based element, and the work seeking requirements were taken away from other groups of social assistance claimants (lone parents, pensioners and disabled people).

¹³ The functions of policing the work seeking behaviour of and administering benefits to the unemployed in Britain have been merged and separated at different time periods. Pre World War II the functions were merged, separated in the early 1970s, and merged again in 1987 with the establishment of the Employment Service (see Fletcher 1997).

¹⁴ See for example, Wright (2003).

servants, partly due to the political association perceived to exist between the senior Civil Service and the pre-Thatcherite political consensus (Ling 1994:37).

The reform implemented from the so-called Ibbs report, is argued to have constituted the most radical break in the history of the Civil Service since the Northcote- Trevelyan report of the 1850s. The latter had proposed the implementation of a professional, male, Oxbridge elite recruited for life through examination as the basis for a depoliticised 'public administration' (Ling 1994:33/34).

In order to increase the efficiency of public administration, and the effective separation of policy from operation, the report advocated the breaking up of the Civil Service into separate agencies that would be responsible for carrying out quasi-contractual obligations (established in a 'framework agreement') (Ling 1994:38). The DSS was thus reorganised into five agencies each with a quasi-contractual relationship with the central department. The result was that 95% of social security staff were employed by agencies leaving only a core of less than 2000 staff under the permanent secretary at headquarters. The 'core' of each department, was to have responsibility for advising ministers on policy; drawing up strategic plans for the department; setting targets for agencies and monitoring their performance (Ling 1994:39).

Non-strategic decisions were therefore to be devolved downwards, and resources and objectives would be centrally controlled whilst entrepreneurship concerning how best to achieve these targets would be encouraged. The

Benefits Agency was one of the largest agencies introduced under the Next Steps programme. Given that the Next Steps initiative was concerned with separating the areas of policy formation and implementation agencies can be considered semi-autonomous. While the sponsoring department (then DSS subsequently Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)) set the Benefit Agency's budget and objectives, the agency had 'managerial independence' (Kavanagh 1996:327).

Such reforms were, it is argued by Clarke and Newman (1997:36), essentially an attempt to change and manage the culture of the Civil Service. Old notions of progress, based on the state and its professionals paternalistically solving social problems, were displaced by a more limited vision of 'more effective service delivery'. 'New Managerialism' as an organising principle is thus argued to have intersected with the New Right project of reshaping state institutions in several ways. Decentralisation, contracting, the creation of 'quasi-markets', privatisation and other processes integral to state restructuring have all placed new emphasis on managerial and business skills. The authors argue that this was not just a process of organisational restructuring, but a large-scale process of cultural change through which 'hearts and minds' could be engaged.

'Managed Liberalisation': Dutch Decentralisation

Until the mid 1980s the main characteristics of the Dutch welfare state included a focus on income compensation via universal and generous benefits, the almost complete lack of an active labour market policy, and a 'friendly and lenient administration' (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:2).

However, during the recession experienced by almost all western welfare states, from 1975-85 the numbers of social security benefit recipients in the Netherlands soared, initiating a discussion about the future of the system.¹⁵ Initially, the debate centred on financial matters but later shifted to more fundamental issues, including the possibility for increasing control, and the necessity of 'modernising' social security (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:8).

The resulting modernisation that took place has been described as a process of 'managed liberalisation' (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:12). On the one hand there is more scope for market provision in the social security system but on the other hand the state tries to manage this market and so limits the freedom of choice. As in Britain, Van der Veen and Trommel (1998:12) argue that a process of cultural change with regard to social security was set in motion, which entered the Municipal Social Services at the end of the 1980s. A particular target here was the 'lenient and friendly' implementation style. It was argued that front line workers were negligent in inspecting clients and hence only selectively enforcing clients' rights and duties.

With the rise of mass unemployment (and the inability of existing social insurance compensation to cope with it) in the 1980s, dependency on social assistance rose steeply, and the Municipal Social Services were transformed into 'benefit factories' (Van den Brande et al 1994:12). Thus, social work, which had been the core business of the Municipal Social Services in the

¹⁵ In the first 5 years (1975-80) the receipt of disability benefits doubled, and in the second 5 years (1980-85) unemployment benefits tripled.

1970s, became subordinate to an administration of handing out benefits the following decade. Moreover, as the social work culture of the Municipal Social Services and their street level staff was primarily directed at the well being of clients, a major argument concerned staff not taking responsibility for the beneficiary's labour market integration. This was considered to be an alien trade to them, and one that they considered pointless anyway because of poor economic conditions (Van den Brande et al 1994:12).

In the 1980s, the 'permissive and sometimes fatalistic attitude' (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:12) of the Municipal Social Services came under increasing criticism. It was argued that they were making social assistance clients worse off as dependency for many unemployed people threatened to become structural. Moreover, when issues of fraud and misuse of benefits turned out to be more serious than thought, the functioning of the Municipal Social Services came under ever more scrutiny, pressuring them to differentiate between the deserving and the undeserving poor. On the one hand, this led to attempts to specify rules and obligations, to an increasing selectivity of the system and to a growth in inspection of clients and monitoring of front line staff. On the other hand it also led to a rearrangement of responsibility, authority and the partial deregulation of social assistance in 1991 (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:12).¹⁶

Such moves were taken in the context of a wider 'Social Renewal Policy', presented by central government as the flagship of its general

¹⁶ Van Oorschot and Smolenaars (1993) argue that such steps were taken partly because of central government's distaste of local income assistance policies.

decentralisation policy. Launched in an attempt to combat multifaceted social problems such as juvenile crime, high unemployment among ethnic minorities, deteriorating neighbourhoods and the isolation of the elderly, the policy was to be implemented at the lowest possible level. In order to ensure that the problems could be tackled in their totality, existing bureaucratic structures needed to be broken down and new co-operation lines between services and institutions to be developed (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:8).

The decentralising legislation effectively saw a number of provisions, formally financed from separate budgets brought under the definition of *Bijzondere Bijstand*. In particular, directing monies to the labour market reintegration of social assistance beneficiaries was one of the explicit aims of the decentralisation of *Bijzondere Bijstand* by central government. Van Oorschot and Smolenaars (1993:18/19) argue that by devolving more discretion to municipalities in the administration of *Bijzondere Bijstand*, a more effective targeting of 'people in real need' was intended.¹⁷ To this end, central guidelines with regard to calculating a person's financial bearing power, established in 1980, were abolished, with the effect that municipalities could again decide whom those in real need were (*Nota van Toelichting* 1989/90).¹⁸

¹⁷ The respondent from the *Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten* (VNG) (Association of Dutch Municipalities) argued that decentralisation occurred because of the complaints by local government of their inflexibility to meet the needs of their inhabitants under the centralising rules. The respondent implied that central government could never have a correct understanding of 537 communities.

¹⁸ The proviso being that the threshold value still exists.

This decentralisation also brought with it significant changes in the financial arrangements for *Bijzondere Bijstand* however. Instead of central government meeting 90% of the cost of *Bijzondere Bijstand*, municipalities were to receive an annual fixed lump sum¹⁹ into their *Gementefonds* or general budget: from which they could decide how much to spend on the special expenses of their inhabitants.²⁰ Social assistance then consisted of a basic benefit that was to be the same for all clients and of a bonus which was dependent on the living conditions of clients. Municipalities were to establish the rights of these citizens to such a bonus, but they also had to finance them. Therefore the deregulation of social assistance was effectively accompanied by the impetus for municipalities to limit their discretion (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:12).

Activation measures to stimulate the labour force participation of social assistance recipients were also initiated in this time period. The duties of the clients were laid down in clear terms, and an indication of this change was the introduction of 'reorientation talks' in 1988 initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Ministry stipulated that the labour market chances of all beneficiaries should be assessed on a regular basis. This measure can be seen as one of the first concrete outputs of active labour market policy, and represented a change in emphasis for the Municipal Social Services and its organisational culture (Van den Brande et al 1994:13). The functional

¹⁹ Van Oorschot and Smolenaars (1993:19) argue that municipalities have to do more with this form of assistance but with a fixed and expectedly too low budget. They further argue that essentially, this situation might be expected to have implications for the client groups that will benefit from such provision: households with the best chances on the labour market being favoured over those handicapped by age, health or long term unemployment.

²⁰ Rather than accounting for outputs, the concern seems currently to be on municipalities producing evidence on the results of their local anti-poverty measures (VNG respondent.).

decentralisation of the labour provisions in 1991 also had implications for the Municipal Social Services, who were then supposed to co-operate with the labour provisions in order to contribute to the creation of a just and efficient labour market intermediation (Van den Brande et al 1994:13).

Influenced both by public debate and central regulation, the Municipal Social Services tried to regain their legitimacy by further improving their management and administrative performance. By the mid 1990s therefore, active labour market policy had become an integral aspect of a broader process of organisational and administrative reform for most Municipal Social Services. Tendencies towards specialisation and 'new' management concepts - such as standard operating procedures - were introduced usually alongside automation. One of the more important developments for the purposes of this chapter was the introduction of 'Individual Trajectory Monitoring' (*Individuele Traject Begeleiding, ITB*)²¹ for clients in social, education and work experience projects. Clients with a certain distance (measured in 4 phases) from the labour market were to be guided and trained to a level which should enable them to compete in the labour market (Van den Brande et al 1994:14). Special units were created for this purpose, sometimes by the Municipal Social Services themselves but also in co-operation with the labour provisions or by a third party when it is contracted out.

²¹ This was referred to by policy makers and administrators as a 'traject'.

Van den Brande et al (1994:14) argue that whilst the embracing (after some initial doubts) of active labour market policy by most Municipal Social Services as a new social instrument is striking, in general the Municipal Social Services have tried to find a balance between social work and active labour market policy, which has had unintended consequences. The authors argue that Individual Monitoring has caused a classification of clients into 'good', 'bad' and 'no' chance on the labour market. The consequences of this can be that the labour office integrates clients with 'good' labour market chances; the clients with 'bad chances' are taken up by individual monitoring organisations and the ones with 'no chances' are left in the hands of the municipal worker.

In 1996 legislation further defined the evidence that the social assistance client had to provide concerning their earnings and living situations, and the client was also obliged to co-operate with investigations into possible fraud and violations of administrative rules. The number of obligations was increased with respect to job search activities and schooling programmes. Van der Veen and Trommel (1998:19) argue that this 'hardening' of the Dutch welfare state was well demonstrated by the extension of work duties to lone parents. Their 'status apart' was restricted with the 1996 reforms: when their children reached the age of 5, lone parents would be expected to become active in the labour market.

Besides the extension of duties, a large variety of financial incentives were also introduced to stimulate the labour market behaviour of social assistance beneficiaries. These included financial sanctions, but also incentives with *Bijzondere Bijstand*. Such payments were to act as 'carrots' to the labour

market and could be written into clients' individual reintegration plans to fund childcare or education for example (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:20).

Since 1996 then, the organisation of social assistance has been reformed based on the principal-agent model, which has essentially been used to rearrange the relationship between the state (as legislator) and the local municipalities (as administrators). By giving the municipalities responsibility for a part of the social assistance budget the government is trying to encourage efficiency at the level of daily administration (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:22). 'Managed Liberalisation' of the Dutch welfare state, along with increasing the activating character has led to the strengthening of the duties of claimants or benefit recipients and social rights have gradually become more conditional. These attempts changed the administrative culture: from 'lenient and friendly' it has gradually become more rigorous and coercive (Van der Veen and Trommel 1998:22).

In sum, as the preceding sections have demonstrated, the origins of a national and comprehensive income maintenance system in Britain and the Netherlands essentially led to different traditions of cash/care, local/national social assistance and exceptional need provision. Subsequent central government responses to similar challenges of economic recession and rising (long-term) unemployment in the late 1980s and early 1990s (i.e. the reform of administrative structures and increasing conditionality in social assistance benefits) had therefore to be implemented through existing structures and with existing policy in place in both countries. Whilst such changes led to exceptional need schemes which may broadly be described as decentralised,

budget limited and discretionary, at the level of administration the Dutch system was firmly situated within an 'activity fare' social assistance, whilst the Social Fund in Britain remained separated largely from 'welfare to work' policy.

Given that such diverse social assistance configurations might be expected to influence the frame of reference of those who make discretionary decisions on the needs of social assistance beneficiaries, the following part of the chapter documents both the policy aims and the organisational contexts as they were at the time of research.

Policy aims and organisational structures

The following section outlines the aims of policy and the organisational contexts of administration in both countries under study. Drawing on the theoretical propositions outlined in the previous chapter, it highlights that administrative discretion in Britain is more tightly constrained than in the Netherlands. Social fund Officers' discretion is structured by the national Social Fund decision makers guide, by managerialist organisational requirements of meeting targets for clearing work and by their obligation of managing a devolved budget. Further, the structure of the 'Social Fund Section' can essentially be seen as geared to processing a large number of exceptional need applications in accordance with these accountability (i.e. budgets and targets) measures. The Dutch administrators on the other hand are responsible overall for activating their clients either socially or to the labour market and their discretionary decisions in respect of exceptional need

payments are less constrained by central (or local) directions than in Britain. Rather, their constraints in discretionary decision making are more likely to arise from their perceptions of clients' reciprocal behaviour – or the lack of it - for the receipt of social assistance benefit.

Britain

At the time of the research, the Social Fund Guide (SFG) for decision-makers stated that, 'the Social Fund is a scheme to help people with needs which are difficult to meet from regular income' (SFG, 1000), and that it was comprised of two distinct parts. The first was a regulated scheme, providing entitlement to maternity, funeral, cold weather and winter fuel payments for people satisfying certain qualifying conditions. Given the specific interest in discretionary decision making in this thesis, this part of the Social Fund is of less interest than the second, which was described as 'a discretionary scheme under which people may be eligible in certain circumstances for a:

- Community Care Grant (CCG) – intended to meet, or help meet, a need for community care.
- Budgeting Loan (BL) – to meet or help meet an intermittent expense.
- Crisis Loan – to meet, or help meet, an immediate short term need'.

Applicants generally had to be on a 'qualifying benefit', essentially Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance for CCGs (but could apply if leaving care within six weeks (hospital or prison for example) before the receipt of a qualifying benefit) and Budgeting Loans. For the latter the applicant must have been in receipt of a qualifying benefit for a period of six

months. Crisis Loans were not restricted to those on a qualifying benefit, but did have strict eligibility criteria in respect of the level of need: a Crisis Loan should essentially only have been awarded where it constituted the only means of avoiding serious damage or risk to the health or safety of the applicant or member of the applicants family, unless the need was for rent in advance when the applicant was leaving institutional or residential care (SFG 4701). The decision-makers guide containing the national Directions issued by the Secretary of State was over 200 pages long, sufficient to say here then that such a number of Directions will greatly constrain the decision-makers discretion. Furthermore, such constraints will be compounded by their organisational context, discussed below, of being required to work to targets and manage a budget.

Starting from the top of the hierarchical structure, this section will describe the organisation of the Social Fund section within a local office at the time of research, drawing primarily on the main office in which research was conducted.

The annual budget for the Social Fund was awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Districts in the UK, which contained a number of local offices. The local office processed all claims for (social insurance and social assistance related) benefit in (back office) sections. There was a public reception area for customers where they could enquire about the range of social security benefits, the Social Fund included. Of particular importance in this respect was the 'counter staff', the more experienced of whom were quite knowledgeable about the range of benefits available and who often acted as

gatekeepers, 'advising' people as to which of the Social Fund payments they might have wanted to apply for. Whilst many of the Social Fund applications were made by post, applicants requesting a review of a decision, or applying in person at the office for a Crisis Loan would usually be interviewed in a separate (and sometimes screened, as in partitioned) cubicle.

Social Fund sections were made up of a number of Civil Service staff each with different duties. The Higher Executive Officer (HEO) or Social Fund Manager (SFM) was answerable to the (Assistant) District Manager(s) and was responsible for setting local priorities. This involved monitoring the District budget and advising staff accordingly as to what (high, medium or low) priority items should be met. The SFM also worked closely with other (private, public and voluntary) organisations in the local area in order to ascertain needs and disseminate information about the Social Fund. In each office there were a number of 'Social Fund decision makers' (Executive Officer grade) who were also known by their previous title: Social Fund Officers (SFOs).²²

Social Fund decision-makers had a number of 'Social Fund key work objectives'. These included a focus on 'active customer focused services' and targets for accuracy in decision-making. Claims clearance times – i.e. targets - were given in order to 'contribute effectively to the achievement of secure and accurate service'. Other objectives included 'effectively managing the Community Care Grant budget; accepting responsibility for business results

²² Essentially however the decision-makers (Social Fund Officers) were not formally constrained by the Social Fund Manager.

and demonstrating a commitment to the policies and culture of the agency'. When requested, they undertook a review of their colleagues' decisions.

The responsibilities of the A4s (administrative officer) in the local office were mostly, but not wholly, concerned with non-discretionary payments from the Social Fund. Their objectives included accurately calculating entitlements to Budgeting Loans, maternity and funeral claims and contributing towards targets as outlined in the District Business Plan. They were required to accurately action 'work available reports' and mail on a daily basis. Further, they were responsible for accurately implementing and controlling the recovery²³ of Social Fund loans and referrals for civil proceedings, thus making an effective contribution towards District recovery targets. They were required to deal professionally with enquiries from both internal and external customers, and reply to written and telephone enquiries. When requested, they were required to comprehensively gather information on Crisis Loan applications (which might involve speaking with the applicant) to enable accurate decision making by Social Fund Officers.

A1s (administrative assistant) in the local office were required to accurately register Social Fund applications for the decision-makers thus contributing to clearance targets, accurately maintain transfers of Social Fund documents, file Social Fund documents on a daily basis and maintain stationery stocks on a fortnightly basis.

²³ 'Recoveries': trying to trace people with an outstanding debt to the Social Fund who have (mostly) left benefit.

The objectives and targets that Social Fund staff are given to work with might be argued to be in line with the process of New Managerialism in public management outlined earlier in the chapter. The stress on meeting targets and agency objectives for any given member of staff is further underlined and enforced by the performance related pay system introduced in the 1980s and 1990s (Waine 2000:237).

The Netherlands

As seen, the Dutch municipalities were responsible for the administration of the nationally financed social assistance benefit *Algemene Bijstandswet (ABW)*. While the primary stated objective of *ABW* was to provide a guaranteed income to all Dutch citizens in need, subsidiary aims included the prevention of long-term dependency on benefits and the promotion of social integration (Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment in Eardley et al 1996:273). At the time of the research, the national social assistance rates in the Netherlands were linked to the Dutch minimum wage: couples received 100% of the minimum wage, single parents 70% and the rate for single people was 50% of the minimum wage. In the latter two claimant categories however, a 20% supplement could be claimed if the beneficiary could prove to the municipality that they did not co-habit.

The latter context then, effectively set the national and standardised framework within which all of the Dutch municipalities were obliged to offer social assistance. Anti-poverty policy in the Netherlands however, was both a national and a local concern and each level of government had its own responsibilities. The following subsection considers the local policy making

context as it was at the time of the research. Although set in a national framework, the benefits which will be outlined and described, could theoretically exhibit a great deal of diversity across municipalities. The following sections therefore will refer specifically to the municipalities in which the study was conducted.

Dutch municipalities had three main sources of income. Funds were raised through local taxes and funds were also received from national government for the implementation of specific goals. Of particular concern to the present research is the third source of income from the '*Gemeentefonds*' known as the general or municipal fund. The latter was essentially a budget devolved from central government to the local level without an earmark. Some of the broad goals for this devolved fund however were set within a general agreement between local and national levels of government that there was a need for a policy against poverty. It was within this loose framework that the Dutch municipalities created their own anti-poverty policy with reference to their own local context and concerns. While Dutch municipalities were obliged to take steps to prevent situations of poverty, the *Gemeentefonds* was classed as general means. Consequently not all of the funds necessarily had to be spent on anti-poverty policy.

The responsibility of central government in anti-poverty measures therefore was to define and provide for the broad social minimum via the national and standardised social assistance rates. The 537 Dutch municipalities conversely, from their *Gemeentefonds* had the duty, and/or power to create a local anti-poverty policy based on what they perceived to be their particular

needs, interests and problems. To be able to fine-tune benefits to local and personal circumstances, the municipalities had to design and implement an assistance supplements policy, comprising the rules under which beneficiaries could claim supplements to their basic (*ABW* social assistance) benefits: subsidies for training and education, costs related to (paid) work and special needs costs (Van Oorschot 1998:13).

The form and detail of municipal anti-poverty measures that this general budget was spent on therefore varied from one municipality to the next. For instance municipalities could administer what might effectively be termed as a 'blanket' subsidy over and above any national provision to those on social assistance or who were reliant on a low income. One such scheme existed in the main municipality of research and entailed the social assistance beneficiary receiving a few hundred guilders per year for the relief or prevention of social isolation. It was thus intended²⁴ for social and cultural excursions to the theatre or cinema, or for the membership of sports or other clubs.

It is worth emphasising at this point that such 'blanket' local assistance measures were not implemented in all municipalities. The resulting geographical diversity and variation in the position of Dutch citizens reliant on the social minimum has been pointed out (Muffels and Fouarge 2000:23).

²⁴ Although, because proof of spending is not required, it can in principle be spent on anything the client wishes.

Moreover, there seems every reason to suppose that the diversity among municipalities will remain a continuing feature of this form of social protection. For example, not all municipalities will have large numbers of citizens reliant on social assistance or low incomes. Furthermore, complexities in the political and religious compositions of the Dutch municipalities might also be thought to exert some influence. One respondent²⁵ argued that some of the smaller localities employed Calvinistic conceptions of the causes of poverty. As a consequence, there may be no well-developed municipal anti-poverty policies and those in need are encouraged to turn to the church rather than be cared for by the state. Because of the extensive decentralisation of Dutch social assistance, it has been argued that such provision now lacks a 'collective character'²⁶ (Van Oorschot 1998:14) within an income maintenance system often characterised as all encompassing.

Notwithstanding the latter point, a common instrument used in the prevention of poverty by the Dutch municipalities was the meeting of special needs on an individualised basis with *Bijzondere Bijstand*. As seen, municipalities, although obliged to offer such individual assistance could, from their general budget, decide what amounts were to be spent on meeting such needs. Support could be expressed in the form of meeting either a one-off, or a continuing need that a given individual might have had. Municipalities were relatively free to decide on eligibility criteria and circumstances that warranted the granting of this type of assistance and could implement their own means

²⁵ VNG representative.

²⁶ Such lack of standardisation however, seems of no concern to local policy makers, who seem to enjoy and guard these powers (interviews with local policy makers).

tests in considering the financial bearing power of those on a low income (Van Oorschot and Smolenaars 1993:18/19). There was a nationally stipulated threshold value for such assistance however. Any need below this monetary amount was classed as being a general cost that should be met from general social assistance benefit rather than a special cost.

*Bijzondere Bijstand*²⁷ exhibited a concern for individual development, and seemed to respond to relatively diverse needs. For instance, provision could be used to meet ongoing regular payments for special dietary and medical costs, for furniture in special²⁸ cases and to acquire the skills to work. In this respect, Eardley et al (1996:279) noted that the most common items for which regular extra payments were made included re-training costs, dietary needs, special medical costs, childcare, transport, and household help. However, the authors further pointed to a lack of continuity in the kinds of costs met by the municipalities administering *Bijzondere Bijstand*, a finding not wholly unexpected, when we consider that municipalities could both define a special need and determine the circumstances and conditions which warranted support.

Both of the municipal offices included in the present research administered *Bijzondere Bijstand* in recognition of the services provided by municipal credit banks (*Gemeentelijke Kredietbank*) for which there are no British equivalents (Tester 1987:11). Such banks effectively take account of 'social

²⁷ Bearing in mind the previous definition of what the general and national social assistance rates are thought to cover.

²⁸ The general social assistance rates (are supposed to) cover furniture needs. However, a woman leaving her partner and setting up home for example, might be eligible for such a payment.

circumstances' when providing (sometimes not commercially viable) loans to those on a low income (Tester 1987:11). In theory, as Tester (1987:18) notes, clients requesting an exceptional payment from the local municipal office should be referred on to the credit bank. Only if refused a loan by the credit bank should they then (re)apply to the municipal office.

At the time of research, The Dutch labour market was characterised by high employment growth, a large share of part time employment and low levels of unemployment. However, this 'Dutch job miracle' (Hemerijck et al 2000:229), coincided with a large share of long-term unemployment, and a substantial number of temporary jobs (Muffels and Fouarge 2000:16). There was thus a local policy concern - expressed by national organisations, local policy makers and administrators alike - that the long-term unemployed reliant on social assistance and the growing number of unfilled vacancies be actively matched.

In the context of the latter concern however there was a realisation by local policy makers that citizens in need and reliant on social assistance as a form of income maintenance were not a homogenous group. As Van Oorschot noted (1998:13) it had 'been realised that nearly half of the social assistance beneficiaries ha(d) very little real chance on the labour market', albeit perhaps for different reasons. In effect, at the local level this necessitated differentiating between those clients thought able to work and those with (severe) physical, psychological or social problems. While the latter client groups would be expected to remain (in the interim at least) on social assistance and be 'socially' activated, for others who might have drug or

alcohol addictions or severe debt problems, work activation measures were considered. Without such measures the Dutch employment 'miracle' would have been left to choose from a pool of long-term unemployed beneficiaries who, policy makers and administrators argued, did not possess such basic job-skills as 'getting out of bed at seven o'clock in the morning'.²⁹ As the chapter describes (below), it was the municipal administrator's job to manage this process of social and labour market activation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, organisational hierarchies and divisions in the administration of social assistance varied from one municipality to the next. One of the municipalities included in the present research had recently situated their workers in one of the new Centre for Work and Income³⁰ establishments. Here there were two sets of so-called '*consulents*': one responsible for social assistance income and one for work seeking behaviour. They were required to liaise with each other about any given client. Further, there were supervisory decision-makers situated in the building, who checked their discretionary decisions and acted as a reference point for staff if they had any questions on policy.

In the municipality in which most of the research was conducted the situation was different and a little more complex due to an ongoing process of changing administrative practices towards a more intensive case-management system. There were thus two sets of administrators: *consulents* and case-managers. Both *consulents* and case-managers were required to administer social

²⁹This was a common concern in the interviews with policy makers and administrators.

³⁰ Essentially along the lines of the Jobcentre Plus: one point of contact for all people of working age dealing with work and benefits.

assistance and check that clients were meeting reciprocal obligations (these tasks were separated in the municipality mentioned above). The major difference was that case-managers had more time to allocate to their (smaller number of) clients. In the case of *Bijzondere Bijstand* the case-manager's discretion was broadened and they were encouraged to work more to the to 'spirit' of the legislation. Under this new system the social assistance beneficiary would be required to sign a written and binding contract detailing the mutual contractual obligations of both themselves and the municipality.

In short the central point to make here is that both *consulents* and case-managers were, in the main research municipality, responsible for the clients social assistance income as well as being concerned with the activation of individuals into, what Spies and Van Berkel (2001:105) called, an 'activity fare'. This included both work-related activities and programs for social activation (for example participating in neighbourhood groups). Again, as in the former municipality, discretionary decisions were checked on a regular basis by supervisory 'decision-makers' although, at the time of conducting interviews, it had not yet been decided as to whether the case-managers' decisions were to be checked in this way.

Consulents and case-managers were thus concerned to take note of information³¹ (which may have been compiled previously by a colleague)

³¹ In order to combat regional differences two 'standardising' instruments were being introduced: a computerised information system containing information on the historical backgrounds of clients which are to be used by all organisations in the field of work and income provision. Clients will also be measured in terms of their distance from the labour market. (Spies and Van Berkel 2001:125).

provided on the applicant's 'distance from the labour market', measured in four 'phases', which the client should be moved along. The *consulent* or case-manager then had to devise the client's *Individuele Traject Begeleiding* colloquially known as a *traject*, which should be tailored to the individual's needs and possibilities, in order to ensure the clients integration into work or social participation took place along a smooth chain of command.

Policy makers in both municipalities stressed that the importance of a smooth chain of management for the integration into either work or social participation was that such techniques were thought to leave less room for the social assistance client to 'fall back on their previous ways'. Therefore, complicated social problems as the client may have faced had to be tackled logically and continuously on the *traject* to work, for instance, overcoming drug problems, settling debts, and learning to work (again). It was thought that there was little point, for example, of offering a course or job vacancy to a social assistance client who may be receiving psychiatric help or going through a divorce, before they were ready to take it.

Emphasis on a smooth integration process was further considered to be necessary because the administrator had to devise and manage packages combining state, private and non-statutory organisations, hence the timing of each problem-solving instrument or program had to be managed correctly. As the emphasis here is on guiding or managing a client through the process of labour market or social integration it might be argued that part of the Dutch administrator's role was concerned with reaching a paternalistic social

diagnosis: motivating and helping clients with drug or debt problems, where the latter 'liked it or not'³² was a core part of the job.

Within this framework then, *consulents* and case-managers were required to determine the client's entitlement to (nationally set) social assistance³³ and, over and above this, consider any need for a discretionary ongoing payment (for instance for certain medical or dietary requirements) from *Bijzondere Bijstand*. *Consulents* and case-managers were also responsible for dealing with any exceptional need, for example a cooker or a washing machine, that the client might later have. When making this discretionary decision, one local policy maker stressed that the administrator should keep in mind that (where possible) the client's ultimate goal was the labour market.

We can see then that administrators were charged with different responsibilities. The Dutch administrators were responsible for meeting exceptional needs of social assistance beneficiaries whilst having to activate the beneficiary either socially or to the labour market. The British Social Fund officer on the other hand was charged with meeting exceptional need in the context of a limited budget and targets for clearing work. Essentially, in reference to the 'people processing/people changing' continuum outlined in the previous chapter, the Dutch administrators may be hypothesised to be more concerned with 'people changing' when compared to their British counterparts. Such differences might be expected to go some way to informing their discretionary decisions on need, and will be further reflected in

³² This was encountered 'not often but daily' in the main municipality of research.

³³ As well as any 'local' income measures that they might be entitled to.

the qualifications that are required for their respective occupations, discussed below.

Professionals or bureaucrats? The nature of the personnel responsible for implementation

As Lødemel (1997: 10) notes, the training and professional orientation of the staff employed to implement social assistance and, by extension, exceptional need payments varies. In particular, Lødemel asserts that, where social assistance has remained local and cash-care multifunctional, social workers are much more likely to play a central role. This distinction also holds between schemes that are discretionary and entitlement based. Discretionary schemes will be more likely to employ social workers rather than administrative staff to assess applications.

Bearing in mind the historical origins and development of policy in the Netherlands and Britain outlined earlier, the following section of the chapter illustrates that the distinctions outlined above hold to some degree in the two countries. Such differences, along with their organisational goals and contexts, would essentially be expected to be significant for informing staff's frame of reference in awarding exceptional payments.

Essentially, municipalities recruit administrators according to certain educational and occupational criteria as well as personal qualities, which are thought to be highly relevant by policy makers to the goals of the

organisation.³⁴ For example, the main municipality of research recruited people who had completed a four-year *Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs (HBO)*³⁵ course in social and legal services or who could demonstrate equivalent intellect and working ability. They were looking for professionals who wanted both to move on after 5 years, and with the personality that could respond to and cope with stress, aggression and emotion.

The British administrators conversely were recruited into the Benefit Agency mostly on the basis of meeting a number (determined by the grade of staff) of 'competencies' (for example teamwork; communication and problem solving) which were derived from experiential questioning. Educational qualifications were also taken into account and depended on the grade of staff that was being recruited.

Conclusion

Mabbett and Bolderson (1999:50) argue that the central/local systems that underlie the structure of state implementation can influence the development as well as the nature of any given social policy. This chapter has highlighted that the origin of social assistance in Britain and the Netherlands has led to different developments in, and traditions of, cash/care social assistance provision.

³⁴ Municipal policy makers interviewed asserted that they had moved away from recruiting 'social workers' in the mid 1990s which (partly) accords with the changing role outlined earlier for the municipal social services in the reintegration of the long term unemployed. However, some longer serving members of staff still had a social work background.

³⁵ Translates to 'higher vocational education' and comprises one year's work experience.

Specifically, the origins of national and comprehensive systems of income maintenance in Britain and the Netherlands resulted in differences in the degree to which national social assistance schemes in both countries were centralised and whether, like their Poor Law predecessors, they retained a link with 'care'.

Notwithstanding the different origins of social assistance, a number of similarities in the development of policy were highlighted in both countries – specifically moves to and from discretion – in an attempt to resolve the respective issues of inequity and rigidity in exceptional need provision. The actors involved in resolving these debates however were seen to depend on the degree of centralisation: which essentially influenced the outcome. In the Netherlands, the origins and development of *Bijzondere Bijstand* can essentially be seen as a representation of a struggle for the definition of need between central and local tiers of government. In Britain conversely, moves to and from standardisation stem from central government's concerns about equity amongst claimants and with containing costs.

The chapter highlighted that the concern to reform administrative structures inherent in the projects of 'Managed Liberalisation' and 'New Managerialism' in the Netherlands and Britain respectively, saw the emergence of budget limited exceptional need schemes and increased discretion to the locality. The degree of centralisation and cash and/or care previously established however essentially affected whether or not such provision was incorporated in an activating social assistance policy. Whilst *Bijzondere Bijstand* was firmly

situated in an 'activity fare' context, the Social Fund remained largely separate from the administration of 'welfare to work'.

The chapter concluded by hypothesising that the historical origins and development of policy in this area would be expected to lead to similarities and differences in implementation practises. Before presenting a comparative analysis of the divergence observed, chapter 4 outlines and discusses the methodological approach adopted.

Chapter 4 'Going Dutch': the methodology of doing comparative case-study research

Given the concern with identifying and explaining differences and similarities in discretionary decision-making within social assistance schemes in Britain and the Netherlands, the present research is essentially a qualitative cross-national case study in the substantive area of social security.

This chapter outlines and discusses both the methodological approach taken and the methods used for the collection and generation of secondary and primary data. After justifying the methodological approach employed, an account of how and why the methods of sampling, data generation, collection and analysis were deemed the most appropriate to meet the aims of the research (outlined in chapter 1) is given along with a discussion on their benefits and limitations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the validity and wider application of the research findings.

Methodological approach

While all social research can be argued to involve comparison of some type¹, the term 'cross national' refers explicitly to comparisons between countries (May 2001:200). That said, most scholars in the field use the terms comparative and cross-national interchangeably to refer to the 'explicit, systematic and contextual analysis of one or more phenomena in more than one country' (Kennett 2001:3; Clasen 1999:2).²

¹ In the practise of social research, 'the choice to study an aspect of human relations represents selectivity via comparison' (May 2001:205).

² Bearing in mind the warnings forwarded in regards to treating nations or countries as distinct homogenous entities: we can not assume that people sharing a geographical space will share a culture (May 2001:201).

As in the social sciences generally perhaps, there is no consensus as to what cross-national research is, or should be about (discussed below). There is more agreement however regarding the benefits that can be gained from employing a comparative cross-national perspective. Comparing an aspect of social policy across countries highlights the different mixes (between the state, market and family for example) in providing welfare for individuals (Clasen 2003:578). Further, understanding and explaining the ways in which different societies and cultures experience and act upon similar social, economic and political changes (May 2001:203) may afford an opportunity for policy learning or borrowing between them (Clasen 2003:580).³

Comparisons can also provide us with an 'import-mirror view' (May 2001:208). Dogan (2002:72) argues for instance that, via a dialectical process, the view that we gain 'from afar strengthens the perceptions of our own society' so that 'one knows one's own country better when one knows other countries too' (Dogan 2002:72). Moreover, coming from the perspective of an 'outsider' to another country can lead researchers to ask questions that those more familiar with the system under study would not. Such research endeavours can therefore lead us to reflect upon both our own and others' social systems and the taken for granted cultural norms and values that underpin them (Clasen 2003:581; May 2001:208). Comparative cross-national analysis can therefore be considered as a method of discovery, 'an approach to knowing social reality through the examination of similarities and differences between

³ In this respect Tester's (1987) exploration of social loans in the Netherlands was undertaken to learn lessons relevant to the introduction of the proposed Social Fund.

data gathered from more than one nation' (Elder 1976:210 quoted in Kennett and Yeates 2001:41).

As intimated above, there is no agreement as to whether cross-national research should be 'descriptive, evaluative or analytical' (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:1). As a case study concerned with discretionary decisions in exceptional payment schemes in Britain and the Netherlands essentially the present research sets out to 'study particular issues or phenomena in two or more countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings' (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:1). The explicit focus is thus on diversity in the systems of provision and a concern with identifying systematic patterns of similarities and differences in order to account for diverse responses found (Ragin 1994:108).

As noted in chapter 2, cross-national case studies of a single policy area in a small number of countries such as this are said to constitute the latest generation of comparative studies (Abrahamson 1999:409; Clasen 1999:3; Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:48). Methodologically therefore they are related to a wider tradition of comparative research. Taking a case-study approach can essentially be contrasted with 'grand theories' of political and economic development that are essentially interested in identifying either convergence or divergence, where hypotheses are derived by the researcher from theory and then tested (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:41). Chapter 2 highlighted that, to date, most large-scale comparative work in social assistance has outlined a number of broad trends in provision (Ditch 1999; Gough 1998). Although useful for identifying 'universal trends' in advanced industrial societies such

research can essentially be accused of underestimating the impact of cultural differences (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:5).

Whilst theories of economic convergence were used for the generation of deductive hypotheses in the present research, inductive methods were also used in order to consider factors of divergence. The research was designed to facilitate a more interactive relationship between theory and observation. Such a methodological approach is as stated in chapter 2, closely associated with Esping-Andersen's (1990; 1999) thesis on worlds of welfare capitalism, which argues that different welfare state regimes will respond differently to the same 'globalising forces'.

Essentially then, the present research sought to understand and explain empirically observed differences and similarities in the administration of exceptional need payments by reference to the socio-economic context and historical evolution of policy in this area in Britain and the Netherlands. This necessitated an interpretative and qualitative understanding which is reflected in the data sources and methods: analysis of documents (official policy and academic) and in-depth interviews with the use of vignettes with administrators of exceptional payments in both countries. As discussed below, such a methodological approach meant that 'linguistic and cultural factors could not be downplayed' (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:5).

Methods

Whilst it is argued that there is no distinct social science cross-national method (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:34), it is widely recognised that

employing a cross national perspective adds to methodological problems. Specifically, the generation of comparable data, identifying or constructing appropriate concepts that can be applied across countries, and achieving a sufficient sensitivity towards the different historical and cultural contexts in which national social policies are embedded (Clasen 2003:579) can be particularly problematic and can ultimately challenge the validity of cross national findings.

After justifying the choice of countries included in the research, the chapter will outline the strategies and associated challenges that arose in applying the qualitative methodology cross nationally and provide an account of how the issues involved in accessing, collecting, generating and analysing primary and secondary data were overcome.

Choice of countries

The selection of countries for a cross-national study needs to be justified not least because the choice of countries or cases for comparison will affect the research questions that can be asked (Ebbinghaus 2003:13). The issue of how similar or different the countries included for study can be seems contingent on the theoretical justification offered by the researcher (Dogan and Pelassy 1990). It is only within a given theoretical framework that research questions, and hence choice of countries will seem meaningful (Øyen 1990:4).

Given the present focus on diversity in exceptional need schemes, Britain and the Netherlands constitute a potentially interesting comparison and meet

Ragin's (1994:113) criteria of 'sharing membership in a meaningful, empirically defined category, and offering some potential for advancing social scientific thinking'. As chapter 3 demonstrated, Britain and the Netherlands both have developed welfare states, with programmes in place to meet the exceptional needs of those on social assistance. However, whilst the present schemes share some broad similarities, it was further demonstrated that the historical development of these schemes have led to different configurations of social assistance and exceptional need payments, which set the context for implementation and inform the administrative frameworks for the award of discretionary payments.

The selection of countries included in the research was also contingent on the topic area. Given the lack of in-depth comparative research on social assistance and exceptional need payments the choice of research questions and countries initially seemed unlimited. However, when attempting to construct a manageable research project, too little knowledge in the area of interest can prove frustrating. As Hantrais and Mangen (1996:3) rightly point out 'gaps in knowledge' can prevent effective cross-national comparisons, essentially because, at the very least, 'mapping' or descriptive comparative work across countries is a prerequisite for building hypotheses. Practical issues also influenced and confirmed the choice of countries. Firstly, the student capitalised on her familiarity with the UK's culture and system of provision. Secondly, having established a theoretical justification for comparison with the Netherlands, the student was able to benefit from contacts established between the primary supervisor of the thesis and a Dutch academic in the field. Ultimately then, countries *and* questions were

chosen according to the research topic, theoretical framework and prior knowledge of cases (Ebbinghaus 2003:13).

Comparing Britain and the Netherlands fundamentally affected access to, and the quality and comparability of, data for analysis (Hantrais and Mangan 1996:6). Given that the findings of this study ultimately rest on one person's analysis and interpretation of documents and in-depth interviews, the following section discusses the issues that were involved in accessing the secondary and primary data sources needed.

Accessing documents

Access to a wide and more varied range of secondary data (in this case academic and official, policy related, literature) than is provided by a single country study is one of the main advantages of comparative work. However, several issues can render the collection of such data problematic (Mabbett and Bolderson 1994:34). In case research - where one aim is to locate trends in relation to the wider social context - secondary data is required about a range of background factors. Given that the researcher was based in the UK, it was relatively simple to get both the academic and official sources required for that country's system of provision. In the case of the Netherlands however obtaining sources in the English language was more difficult and methodological issues raised by documentary analysis were compounded by the cross-national element.

In particular, initial familiarity with the Dutch system had to be gained almost entirely from secondary academic and policy texts written in English (see

below). Many of these up to date (1998/99) writings stressed that 'social workers' were responsible for the implementation of social assistance and initial hypotheses in the first few months of the research project were generated accordingly. On the first research visit to the Netherlands however, conversations with local policy makers, made it apparent that recruitment criteria had changed in the previous 5 years or so and social workers were no longer specifically recruited by municipalities for the administration of social assistance.

Whilst this did not necessitate an abandonment of the research focus, it does highlight the difficulties involved in generating hypotheses for empirical research in more than one country from secondary sources and the importance of early research visits. Such visits however are obviously constrained by issues of cost. In the present case, the student was fortunate enough to receive funds from COSTA13 for a 'short-term scientific' project of two weeks duration. This initial visit was used to cultivate networks for the main research and fieldwork visits.⁴

A recognised issue where secondary sources are to be used in cross national research is the availability of comparable data, and the fact that data sets do not always exist in a standard format for the topic of interest in all of the countries under study. Such issues can potentially invalidate comparisons or make them extremely difficult. In his study of discretionary social assistance payments to meet exceptional needs, Ditch (1995:356) had already noted that

⁴ This extended visit (discussed further in the chapter) was part funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

some European governments did not report the amounts spent on these payments.⁵ In the present research, differences in the degree to which central/local government were responsible for social assistance provision essentially meant that there were differences in collecting both expenditure figures and official policy documents in the two countries under study. For example, in the relatively centralised UK system, the national guide for Social Fund decision-makers, yearly reports and statistics on national expenditure were available to download from the Internet from one Government Department. In the Netherlands conversely, accessing comparable secondary data and sources reflected the fact that social assistance provision is the concern of both local and national government. The total amount allocated by central government for *Bijzondere Bijstand* was available from one source. However, the specific amounts that were actually spent by each municipality and the respective guidelines for implementation of policy were firmly local concerns and had to be accessed accordingly.

A further consideration in cross-national research is whether documentary sources are available in a language accessible to the researcher. In this case, much of the municipal policy material required was not, texts were in the Dutch language and the researcher had limited capabilities in this respect. Therefore the material needed had to be (selectively) translated into English. Given the potential costs of employing a commercial agency for this, two Dutch nationals resident in the UK – both of whom had excellent bi-lingual skills,

⁵ As Hantrais and Mangen (1996:8) note, in some countries information may be more limited or even non-existent on a particular policy output because the issue has attracted less attention from policy makers.

were employed to assist with translations and some basic Dutch language lessons for the researcher.⁶

The chapter now turns to those issues that were encountered in accessing participants for the qualitative in-depth interviews in both countries. First however, a brief rationale for the sampling procedure adopted is given.

Sampling

Given that the empirical work was in part concerned to test, develop and generate theory on administrative action or practices (using concepts such as 'people-processing' and 'people changing') offices and administrators in both countries were sampled in the light of these theoretical concerns (Strauss and Corbin 1990:176). Because of the sampling strategy adopted, the research can make no claim to being representative of the wider population of interest in either country. However, given the aims of the research, the latter point was thought to be of less importance. That said, Lipsky's (1980) assertion that the coping routines and behaviour of social service agency staff, might in part be contingent on the area in which they work (degree of poverty; amount of applicants/case-loads per administrator) did inform the geographical areas that were included in both countries. Such assertions did not prescribe the offices chosen however, ultimately because of the challenges encountered in gaining access to offices (particularly in Britain), which are highlighted below.

⁶ One agency quoted a figure of £500 for a few days work.

Accessing local and municipal offices

The empirical research discussed below was conducted during an extended field visit to the Netherlands in the summer (May – July) of 2001, and in Britain during the winter/spring 2001/02. On site interviews were carried out with 25 street-level staff in two municipal offices in the Netherlands (in addition, 3 municipal policy makers, a local politician, a representative from the *VNG* and several Dutch academics in the field were also interviewed). In Britain, 17 street-level Social Fund staff in three local offices (see Appendix 1 for details of participant's gender) were interviewed. Whilst assurances of anonymity of location⁷, staff and customers were crucial factors for respondents' participation in the research there was essentially no single successful strategy for accessing each research location.

Those who implement discretionary payments in both countries are government officials, who therefore work in government institutions. As many commentators have argued, accessing institutional settings can require that the researcher gain consent from gatekeepers who have the power to grant permission that research be carried out (Burgess 1991:195; Homan 1991:83; Mason 1996:57). Duke (2002:39) notes the political dimensions involved in conducting research on elites in the policy network and negotiating access to those who, rather than being the 'objects' of policy, are in the relatively powerful position of 'making' policy. She argues however that 'there is a paucity of methodological and reflexive accounts' (2002:41) of how elite populations are researched.

⁷ For this reason offices will remain anonymous and staff are not given pseudonyms.

The following section of the chapter highlights that, in line with the principle of informed consent (Bulmer 1982), gaining access was a multi-layered and on-going process with participants. It illustrates that, whilst the consent of those at the top of the hierarchy was a necessary precondition for accessing such settings – for different reasons in both countries - it did not guarantee the participation of the discretionary decision-makers.

The Netherlands

Primarily, consent was negotiated with policy makers and senior managers in municipal offices who agreed, in principle, to the research and subsequently acted as a point of initial contact between the researcher and the street-level decision-makers. In both locales, policy-makers forwarded a letter of introduction to the street-level staff from the researcher, which briefly explained the research and invited them to contact the researcher by e-mail. Whilst this meant that participation was entirely voluntary the initial response rate was low. It subsequently transpired during one of the first interviews that some potential respondents were quite anxious about conducting an interview in English that dealt with the technicalities of administering social security benefits.⁸ However, their inquisitiveness in the research and their colleagues' assurances that it 'wasn't so bad' to conduct an interview about their work in the English language eventually overcame their fears.

In the second municipality in which letters of introduction had been left however there were evidently no such powerful feelings of inquisitiveness to

⁸ One of the first respondents stated that they had been so worried about the interview that they had spent the weekend with a Dutch/English dictionary looking up English words like 'policy'.

overcome any language fears. After seven weeks, and several phone calls to the point of contact no respondents had come forward. The strategy adopted here was to take up an invitation previously offered by a local politician to 'shadow' them for the day.⁹ Hearing the researcher's plight, one brief telephone call later and the local politician declared that it 'been arranged' for the student to go in to the municipal office the next day.

Whilst consent was sought individually with all staff interviewed in this office, given the manner in which the setting was accessed (from above) the researcher can never know how freely staff gave it (Mason 1996:57). What the participants did feel free to say however was, with one exception, that they wanted to be interviewed in pairs (in fact, in once case there were 3 participants) so that they could 'help each other' with their English. This ultimately had consequences for the quality of the data generated and will be discussed further in issues concerning language (below).

Britain

In the office in which the majority of the research was conducted in Britain initial consent was given from a senior manager who, as in the Netherlands, agreed to distribute an introductory letter to the Social Fund staff. Further contact was made with the senior figure who voiced that staff had no objections to the researcher visiting the office. This office was subsequently

⁹ This entailed sitting through eight meetings, all of which were conducted in Dutch.

visited one day a week for a period of approximately 6 weeks during which time access was further negotiated with each member of staff interviewed.

Using the strategy above, initial access was again negotiated with a senior manager to a second local office. This time however, the street level staff refused to participate in the research. Accounts of 'not getting in' to research locations are perhaps less written about in methodological texts, partly because they can perhaps be seen as an admission of failure. However, such encounters essentially constitute data in themselves and their analysis can provide 'instructional material' (Punch 1986:14).

Adhering to the principle of continually seeking consent from participants, staff in the second office were informed by the researcher that they were being asked to take part in in-depth interviews in which a series of vignettes would be used. Discussion between the researcher and staff ensued and ultimately staff decided to refuse to participate in the research stating concerns that the researcher could be looking at differences in their decision making, and that such findings might ultimately be published. As Homan (1991:78) argues, refusal by potential participants can be seen as defensible positions that 'skilled researchers' should be able to erode, rather than legitimate stands that should be accepted and unchallenged.

In regard to the present study, the researcher did stress to staff that the *primary* interest of the research was differences in decision-making between administrators in the two countries, rather than between Social Fund Officers in Britain. However, this did not quell staff concerns and they still questioned

the need to interview 'more than one officer'. Eventually, they did offer to treat the researcher as a 'press and public relations' exercise. This 'interview' consisted of the Social Fund Officer sitting with the Social Fund 'manual' quoting directions and regulations in response to the vignette scenarios. This at least assured the researcher that the data generated in the previous office had been rich and relatively unfettered.

Trying to provide a reflexive account of why consent was refused is quite difficult. We can discern that assurances of anonymity were not enough in this case to overcome any sensitivity that staff might have felt about (differences in) their discretionary decision making. Further, there were wider occupational issues for DWP staff at that time, one of which was the proposal to introduce un-screened environments for Social Fund staff in Jobcentre Plus offices.

Because of that experience highlighting that consent from the top of an organisational hierarchy does not (and ethically should not) guarantee participation from street level staff a different strategy was used to gain access to decision-makers in two further local offices in Britain. Essentially access was first sought from street-level staff who in turn negotiated consent for the researcher to visit the office with those further up the organisational hierarchy.¹⁰ This strategy however did have drawbacks in that the research visits were conducted in one day and hence less time was spent in the offices.

¹⁰ When the researcher telephoned a local office, it was invariably a Social Fund Officer that took the initial call. Instead of asking to speak with the Social Fund Manager (as had been the previous strategy), the researcher instead explained the research to the Social Fund Officer, who subsequently agreed to take part (and ask one or two of their colleagues to do so) and moreover to arrange it with their manager.

Through numerous visits to the two main offices of research in both countries, a deal of familiarity with the settings was achieved. This also facilitated social access and helped ensure a degree of trust between respondents and interviewer (argued to be essential in qualitative research for getting respondents to 'open up' (May 1997:119)). In the main office in Britain staff often voiced that the camaraderie in the office was one of the main benefits of their working environments. As 'the student in to get her degree' the researcher was not immune to the odd jocular comment. After the first couple of visits, a standing joke on the researcher's arrival at the office came from one or other participant along the lines of 'you can do the Crisis Loans today can't you – you know enough about them by now'.

One of the primary analytical benefits of spending time in the research setting was that it also facilitated some direct (although informal) observation of working practises. Without doubt, such observations served an important role in contextualising and substantiating the data gained from in-depth interviews. More formal observation of staff client interaction was also carried out in the Netherlands when the researcher was invited to sit in on a face to face meeting between administrator and a client requesting payment from *Bijzondere Bijstand* for a washing machine.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

On site in-depth qualitative interviews utilising vignettes were carried out with administrators of exceptional payments essentially in order to generate an understanding of the 'conceptual frameworks of actors in both countries' (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:51). The benefit of flexible qualitative interviews

is that they allow the researcher to gain an insight into a given social process and to understand the symbolic worlds of participants, thus facilitating a greater understanding of the meanings that participants give to their actions (Fielding 1993:157). In ethnographic tradition then, they allow the researcher to 'get at' the participant's perceptions and definitions of the situation and facilitate an in-depth knowledge of social behaviour. Interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix 2) and thematic questions were constructed from the theoretical literature. Essentially, the interviews were structured enough to allow comparability of responses within and between countries and yet flexible enough to allow the researcher to probe responses, and allow participants to answer more on their own terms than is permitted by a standardised interview (May 1997:123).

None of the participants refused the request that the interview be tape-recorded and hence all were. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, with the average being just over an hour. Depending on availability, interviews were conducted either in screened or un-screened rooms in Britain, and entirely in un-screened rooms in the Netherlands. The environment in which the interviews were conducted was of course data in itself and said something about both the relative levels of demand and the resources allocated to provision by Government in both systems. In comparison to Britain, the interview rooms in the Netherlands were clean,¹¹ air conditioned, had low level lighting, and because there was no screen to spatially partition

¹¹ As Tester also noted in her comparison of the two locales (1987:40). It is noticeable that, in three of the four offices visited for research purposes, staff requested that the student access the building via the staff entrance rather than the customer one.

client from administrator, felt less hostile, unless one happened to be sitting in the 'client's chair' and tried to put this back under the desk when leaving the room: impossible, being as it was bolted to the floor. Security guards were located in all offices in both countries and hence (although differing in degrees of subtlety) there were signs as to the threat of violence. Other indicators of their respective working environments came from the surroundings whilst the interviews took place. For example, in Britain 'outside' the room one could primarily hear bustle from the staff on one side, and the noise from the customer side on the other. In the Netherlands, there was a distinct lack of noise from the customer side (perhaps because it was further away, or because the main wall partition was better sound proofed).

Interview questions were designed and worded in order to be as non-threatening as possible. One of the first questions asked, 'how did you come to be in this job'?, was particularly helpful in this respect. Whilst it had a firm theoretical underpinning (to test Lipsky's (1980) assertion that street level bureaucrats seek out their helping professions) it also served as a 'warm up' question which immediately seemed to put respondents at ease. Without fail it elicited rich, detailed and often quite personal data further indicating a degree of trust on the part of participants.

Given the highly flexible nature of this data generating method, questions could be re-worded by the interviewer and responses explored. In both countries, the method allowed new themes and concepts ('the regulars', 'motivation') to emerge in the first interviews that could then be followed up in subsequent interviews with respondents. In sum, the interviews were found to

be structured enough for comparative purposes yet flexible enough as a method of discovery. As discussed below however, there are issues concerning 'language' (and hence ultimately understanding) involved in applying such a method cross nationally. That said, it is argued here that the method itself went some way to overcoming these.

'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world'¹²

One of the benefits of qualitative interviewing or 'conversations with a purpose' (Mason 1996:38) is that participants can provide the researcher with an in-depth account of their perceptions of their social world. In a cross national context, a shared language for communication and understanding concepts between researcher and interviewee is crucial. Given that the researcher spoke little Dutch, all of the interviews were conducted in English. As discussed in regards to accessing participants, some Dutch administrators were worried that they would not be able to explain themselves properly or would misrepresent themselves and their work by communicating in a language which was foreign to them. Administrators perhaps recognised that language was not simply a medium for conveying concepts. As Hantrais and Mangen (1996:7) note, words are part of a conceptual system that reflect institutions, thought processes, values and ideology, implying that the approach to a topic and the interpretation of it might well differ, according to the language of expression.

For instance, if a culture has no notion of any given concept, then transference, and translation arguably become problematic. There is also the

¹² Wittgenstein (1923) quoted in Winch (1958:18).

difficulty of fully understanding the meaning of terms, which within a particular national, or indeed organisational, context may have a cultural loading. In the present research for example the researcher was initially unsure of the meanings attributed by the Dutch administrators to clients they perceived as 'not motivated'. Was that conceptually comparable to 'lazy'? Through probing in numerous interviews however, such meanings gradually became clearer.

Whilst understanding such cultural meanings was challenging, it was also a fascinating and enjoyable process to engage in (there were similar issues arising in interviews with Social Fund Officers. On more than one occasion the researcher encountered informal terms - administrative concepts of 'regulars' for example, - which had to be explained to the researcher and their meaning checked in subsequent interviews). Ultimately the process of making, interpreting and checking meaning between interviewee and interviewer is made absolutely explicit when one party responds in a language foreign to them.

The major difficulty for the Dutch respondents was that they had to translate Dutch concepts, into an English equivalent. Thus, May (2001:216) argues that even where the interviewees' command of English is good, there may be terms in their own language for which they do not know (or can not remember) the English equivalent, and this can lead to ambiguity. Partly this can be overcome however, by the method itself. In the present research the qualitative interviews were superbly suited to being able to negotiate and check meaning and allow a detailed explanation of concepts.

For example, the following quote highlights this. The participant in question could not remember the English word 'independent'. In order to get meaning and understanding across to the researcher they were left with little option but to explain the *concept* of it in detail:

Participant: in the case of the medical em, situations, where people say ' I need that because I have medical problems', we have eh, contacts with uh, we call it the *GGD*¹³.

Researcher: oh, what's that?

Participant: it's a sort of, I don't know how to say it. A sort of hospital, but not, people are not laying in the hospital. But there work doctors there and they have uh, a dentist and they have for every sort of things they have a specialist there. And most, and if (clients) have medical (pauses) / am *not* a doctor and I can not decide for my customer if it is necessary for him. So if there comes uh, a request for, we send it to the *GGD*, and he is also uh, how do you say that? Uh. So, if people go to their own. They *have* to go there, maybe they have already been earlier to another doctor: they still have to go there (to the *GGD*) because they are not

Researcher: they're independent?

Participant: Independent! That's the word! Independent: do not know the customer before, so he can make an independent advise for us ..

Whilst the majority of respondents felt comfortable enough to conduct the interview unaided¹⁴ in English, a sizeable minority of them – notably all of whom worked in the second municipality in which access was negotiated with

¹³ *Gemeentelijke Gezondheids Dienst* (Municipal Health service).

¹⁴ It was standard practise for interviewees before hand to forewarn the interviewer that they might need 'help with some words'.

the local politician mentioned above - did not, and requested that they be interviewed together so that they could 'help each other' with their English.

Jentsch (1998:278) notes that there are two main methodological issues raised when interpreters facilitate communication, which are usually 'swept under the carpet by researchers'. The first is the effect of a third (and in this case sometimes even a fourth) person on the social dynamics of the interview. Interpreters are not mere instruments for the transference of speech; the interviewer and the interviewee can and will ascribe a more active role to them. Indeed, by far the major effect in regards to the present research was the change of dynamics from a one to one interview that such situations entailed. Subsequent interaction was relatively difficult to manage for the researcher. Who to maintain eye contact with when speaking? How to probe one interesting response without appearing rude or uninterested in the other participants' answers? Given time constraints in conducting interviews with up to three people at a time, in the main it worked out that different participants gave extended answers to different questions. Moreover, in the most extreme case (3 participants together) it was not at all clear as to which of the participants' interpretation was being elicited for analysis at any given time.

For example, the following extract illustrates that respondents were sometimes concerned to negotiate meaning between themselves, and the data generated is therefore more like that gained from the method of a focus group (Cronin 2001:168).

(discussing scenario 3, see Appendix 3)

Participant 1: Oh yeah, difficult

Participant 2: Difficult, because the ex-partner's sold the things and that's difficult to prove.

Participant 3: I think if they can not prove it so, it's always difficult.

Researcher: Because she can not prove

Participant 3: That the ex partner's sold the things

Participant 2: And that she had them before

Participant 3: But when she's six months in that home, well I think it's normal that you don't have any stuff then

Participant 1: But she has first to go to the credit bank

Participant 3: Yes, of course, it's always first to the credit bank..

In relation to language, one of the most crucial points for qualitative researchers employing the skills of an interpreter would be that the data generated between the interviewer and the interviewee has been 'filtered' by a third party. This is related to Jentsch's (1998:287) second point: the effect on the (counter) transference of speech. Interpreters might 'simplify' answers, or change the meaning of a question, which has consequences for the faithfulness of the interpretation. In the main however, the respondents' English language skills were very good, and most of them only needed the odd word translated from their colleague, either an English word spoken by the interviewer into Dutch, or a Dutch word translated into English for their response.

Vignettes

A series of vignettes (see Appendix 3) were also employed in the in-depth interviews in order to further elicit and explore the factors informing the

administrative frame of reference for the award of discretionary payments in both countries.¹⁵ Previous cross-national research in this topic area has used vignettes in order to help explain the ways in which social assistance systems structure provision to meet exceptional need (Ditch 1995). Whilst this concern was not absent from the present research, vignettes were primarily used as a tool for eliciting qualitative data from administrators on their perceptions and meanings of the deserving and undeserving poor in both countries.

Vignettes have been defined as 'short descriptions of a person or social situation, which contain precise references to what are thought to be the most important factors in the decision-making or judgement making process of respondents' (Lee 1993:79). The literature on vignettes as a method emphasises the usefulness of the technique when the researcher is concerned with employing a standardised data collection tool. In the current research, presenting the same case scenarios of social assistance beneficiaries requesting exceptional payments to respondents ensured a degree of standardisation across countries and administrators whilst allowing the researcher to explore the two different, administrative groups' responses to, and interpretations of, uniform situations (Barter and Renold 1999).

As well as providing a degree of standardisation however, the vignette is also a method which acknowledges that meanings are social and morality may well be situationally specific (Finch 1987:105/106). Thus while vignettes allowed the researcher to control the situation presented to respondents,

¹⁵ In an attempt to avoid ambiguity, the vignettes were translated into Dutch for the administrators in the Netherlands. However, when reading the vignettes aloud, administrators translated them into English.

participants could define the meaning of the four hypothetical applicants' situation in their own terms. By presenting the participant with a set of concrete and detailed situations, the vignette elicited administrative perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes regarding the deserving and undeserving poor, thus helping to derive the cultural and organisational norms that informed the administrators' frame of reference and working practises.

In order to avoid problems of boredom and fatigue (Lee 1993:80) the number of vignettes presented to respondents was limited to a total of four. Primarily vignettes were constructed with some prior knowledge of the exceptional needs that might be met by the respective systems and the theoretical writings on the deserving and undeserving poor in mind, thus informing whether hypothetical characters were portrayed as able or non able bodied, whether they had children and whether they could be perceived as morally responsible for their plight or not (Van Oorschot 2000). Further, the length of time that hypothetical characters were portrayed as having been on social assistance was informed by the dynamics of poverty.

In constructing the scenarios the researcher attempted to ensure that, as Barter and Renold (1999) argue, stories appeared plausible and real to participants. However, the authors' suggestion that stories need to avoid depicting disastrous events, and should instead reflect 'mundane' occurrences was thought not to be appropriate for this research. Paradoxically the researcher considered that in order to appear plausible and real to participants who administer exceptional need payments stories would, in part, have to depict disastrous scenarios. This of course reflects the

contextual nature of social research. The scenarios presented to administrators were highly recognisable in each country, as the following quotes exemplify.

In Britain, one respondent voiced:

Participant: They're quite likely scenarios by the way.

Researcher: are they?

Participant: Yeah, they *are*, they're more or less what passes across our desks, you know on a regular basis. So they're as near the truth as you'll probably get, uh, and we have to decide, looking at them individually: pay, don't pay sort of thing. So I mean. They're quite good though. I don't know, where did you get them? Did you make them up or ?

Researcher: I did, yeah.

Respondent: Woah! (laughs) you, you can get a job here then! (laughs) Yeah, they're more or less true to life, absolutely, yeah. We get them on a regular basis. So yeah, you're clued up about what's happening: anytime you want a job at the social!

Similarly, in the Netherlands a supervisory decision-maker commented that:

Respondent: The cases you brought to us, they were cases that are happening, yeah well, all the day.. They are no(t) special cases or exceptions.. .. those cases are our regular work, so that's, those are the items that .. I see twenty times a day, yeah. And the *consulents* well, they have them three or four times a day.. The people who don't have a job at this moment and are depending on the *Bijstand* we give them, well they are the people who have the more, the most problems and the less expectations about the future, so the things you .. or the cases you brought to us, well, it's one on one at this moment.

Essentially, the vignettes contained sufficient context for respondents to have an understanding about the situation being depicted, but were vague enough to 'force' participants to provide and construct additional social factors about (their perceptions of) deserving and undeserving clients upon which they would base their discretionary decisions. In practise, this initially felt like a process of 'appropriation' from the researcher. For example, on occasions in the Netherlands, the hypothetical applicant in vignette scenario 1 became a former 'drug addict' with a 'difficult past'.

Comparatively speaking then, the vignettes represented a standardised tool for the generation of qualitative data and allowed the divergent responses of the systems and administrators to emerge. They elicited well the tensions that arose in the Dutch system in trying to activate people whilst meeting exceptional need and in the case of Britain, in trying to meet need in the context of a limited budget. Such issues could then be probed further in the context of the in-depth interviews. Ultimately, vignettes served as an efficient tool for gathering comparable data to enable the identification of similarities and differences in practise (Third 2000:456).

Undoubtedly however, there are difficulties in generalising from the judgements or responses participants make when confronted with a vignette to their actual behaviour when faced with a comparable situation (Lee 1993:81). What was notable in the present research, was that the scenarios, because recognisable, often prompted respondents to discuss discretionary decisions they had made in the past when confronted with similar circumstances. They thus talked not only of what they 'would do' in such

situations but of what they 'had done' previously. Moreover, the responses generated by the vignettes concurred with data from in-depth interviews and observation.

The final benefit of this method in the context of researching an area of social security provision was found to be that 'areas which are controversial as a consequence of changes to the normative consensus surrounding them, are very readily studied with vignettes' (Lee 1993:81). In Britain many of those interviewed were relatively long serving members of staff and had seen many changes to the system they worked in, and in the municipality in which the majority of research was conducted in the Netherlands they were in the process of changing to a case-management system, thus information on 'what would have happened to the applicant' before was often forwarded unprompted.

Analysis

As in much qualitative research perhaps, analysis was not a distinct stage in the research, rather it was an ongoing and sequential process that began when the researcher was gathering data (Fielding 1993:167). Concerned with identifying and explaining similarities and differences in exceptional need provision analysis was an interactive process and findings were generated by moving between deduction (from literature) and induction (generating theoretical propositions from empirical data generated).¹⁶

¹⁶ There is some debate as to whether testing or generating theory are the proper pursuit of case-studies (see for example Goldthorpe 1997 and other contributions to that volume).

As said, the qualitative interviews allowed the emergence of analytical themes that could be followed up in subsequent interviews. To this end, fieldwork journals were kept by the researcher, and notes were written up on the way to and from offices. Some of these notes necessarily contained the researcher's feelings regarding the process of conducting qualitative work in this topic area. Thus, whilst steps were taken to limit potential harm to participants, it is also recognised that there may be ethical issues for a researcher engaged in an in-depth study on such a topic. Suffice it to say that the dynamics of poverty offer little respite to those researching (or for that matter, and far more importantly, working) in the realms of exceptional payments. This was especially so in the British context of the 'segregated Social Fund' (rather than the Dutch system where administrators often voiced that they got satisfaction out of 'getting people on a job'): staff seemed daily subsumed in human misery for a living. As others have argued however (Lee 1995:53; Kleinman and Copp 1993) such feelings can essentially serve an analytical purpose and in the present research staff coping mechanisms were brought to the fore. Social Fund staff in particular often voiced for example that on starting their jobs, they had to change or as they sometimes put it 'become hard'; 'not think about it', use 'black humour' and (try) to disengage themselves from their clients.

Familiarity with the data generated, and hence analytic understanding was also facilitated by the researcher transcribing the data tapes. In this way, emerging themes were picked up. Because of their semi-structured, yet qualitative and in-depth nature, the interview data generated facilitated a number of analytic strategies. Their qualitative nature allowed that the data

could be cut and pasted by theme, and interviews were also kept in their entirety to maintain records of any inconsistencies in individuals' accounts. Being semi-structured they further allowed the comparison of administrative responses to specific theoretically informed questions, and hypothetical applicants (via vignettes) within and between countries. Given the amount of qualitative data that interviews generated, analytical themes were first identified and written up country by country before the comparative analysis proper was undertaken.

As May (1997:185) points out in regards to cross-national research, the analyses and interpretations made by researchers should avoid 'simply tacking on preconceived ideas and even prejudices on the operation of societies' as this will do little to further our understanding. For the present research this primarily raises questions about the assertions made by the researcher on the Dutch system and administrative practises.

Partly this was overcome by living in the Netherlands (as an outsider) for an extended period of time (3 months)¹⁷, which facilitated a degree of cultural immersion. Because familiarity with the national history and culture is considered essential in case research, Øyen (1990:16) also recommends close collaboration with a country-based social scientist to use the latter's

¹⁷ For the main research visit. This was preceded by an initial visit of 2 weeks, and the researcher subsequently visited the Netherlands for a month in the summer of 2002.

local knowledge to help tie together the researchers intensive data in a meaningful way. The researcher benefited from conversations with a number of academics in this respect. On every research visit Wim Van Oorschot found time to helpfully discuss the progress of the research (from hypotheses building through to initial findings). Joop Roebroek and Ruud Muffels were also more than generous with their time for discussion.

On a day to day basis, any meanings the researcher might have inferred from daily observations and interviews (not only those associated with research) could be checked later with the Dutch nationals who shared the researcher's accommodation.

One further point that should be made was the usefulness for analytical purposes of having conducted fieldwork in the Netherlands first. As mentioned earlier one of the purposes and benefits of comparative research is that it can provide a 'mirror image' of the system with which the researcher is most familiar: Britain in this instance. It might thus be counter intuitive to suggest visiting the least familiar country first. Essentially however it transpired that, after the empirical research in the Netherlands, the Dutch system was the system the researcher knew best, certainly from an administrative perspective. Returning to Britain and conducting empirical research then facilitated more of an 'outsiders' perspective of the British system. Particular issues that stood out in this respect became the perceived lack of control, the lack of house visits, and the frustration of staff with the system they worked in.

Validity

Debates concerning the grounds on which analytic findings should be considered reliable and valid are said ultimately to depend on the theory of the social world employed (Kirk and Miller 1986:50). The philosophy of qualitative research considers the social world as embedded in a specific time and place and recognises that interaction between researcher and participants will partly be dependent on their respective social characteristics. Hence 'replicability' in any positivistic sense is seen to be problematic. Nevertheless, such research can employ strategies to help assure the researcher that they have accurately portrayed and interpreted the 'meaning attached by participants to what is being studied' (Johnson 1997:1). Primarily, in the present research triangulation of qualitative methods for collecting primary data was used.¹⁸ Extended periods in the fieldwork settings and observation of working practises (as discussed earlier in the chapter) thus helped to contextualise the data generated in the interviews with vignette scenarios. Methods were applied in a systematic and rigorous way and as stated above, detailed sets of field (and analytical) notes were kept throughout the research process.

Generaliseability

It is recognised that there are inherent difficulties in drawing wider generalisations from detailed cross-national case studies that necessarily focus on a small number of countries (Clasen 1994:4). In part this might be overcome by, for example, choosing countries for inclusion that are

¹⁸ Thus there was less risk of generating conflicting findings than if combining quantitative and qualitative methods for example (Mason 1996:149).

recognised to belong to a given regime type as forwarded by Esping-Andersen (1990). As chapter 2 highlighted, the UK has been posited as a liberal welfare regime and the Netherlands as (although not without debate) conservative. Given the recognition that social assistance regimes might be quite distinct from the wider welfare regime in which they are situated however such a strategy is not without caveats. Moreover, limitations in this respect should also be recognised given the accessing and (theoretical) sampling strategies adopted and the relatively small (and non-representative) number of offices and administrators included in the study from each country. That said, much of the country specific research findings generated do concur with previous empirical research in both countries.

Ultimately perhaps, as Goldstone (1997:108) notes, the logic of comparative case studies is a combination of deductive and inductive reasoning aimed more at providing explanations for *particular* cases, rather than at providing general hypotheses that apply uniformly to all cases in a suspected case-universe. As he goes on to say, the findings (regarding administrative perceptions and behaviour in given contexts) from the present research could be suggested as 'general hypotheses' which could, in further research, then be tested and modified by expanding the range of cases.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline both the methodological approach taken and the benefits and limitations of the methods chosen to meet the aims of the research. As seen, whilst there is no distinct cross-national method, such

research does highlight some of the issues raised in making social scientific as opposed to impressionistic comparisons (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:34).

Essentially in cross-national case studies that try to get closer to culture specific factors there are problems involved in applying the methodology (Mabbett and Bolderson 1999:50).

As has been highlighted, this cross-national research project inherently required the researcher to consider many methodological issues and devise strategies in an attempt to overcome the problems that were encountered. Some of the problems that were faced equate with the conduct of qualitative research more generally. As such, they could not have been entirely anticipated by the researcher and had to be resolved as they arose. The chapter thus highlighted the strategies pursued to gain access to and informed consent from the decision-makers, which were compounded in the Netherlands by issues of language.

It is hoped that the logic of this account, the explicit discussion of the solutions adopted, and the noted limitations of the data will inform the evaluation of the researchers interpretations, and convince others that the theoretical leaps made in the following chapters are justified.

Chapter 5 Administrative routes to employment

Social service delivery jobs are among the most stressful in society (Elmore 1997:251). Street-level bureaucrats are often confronted with inadequate resources, physical and psychological threats and conflicting and ambiguous role expectations. Nevertheless, 'people often enter public employment, particularly street-level bureaucracies, with at least some commitment to service', seeking out 'these occupations because of their potential as socially useful roles' (Lipsky 1980:xii).

However, following Peters' (1985:89) suggestion that we should study the motivations personnel hold for applying for such positions, this chapter highlights differences in the reasons that the two sets of administrators gave for applying for their employment positions. The chapter illustrates that the Dutch administrators had often purposely embarked on a previous course of study and a subsequent career in helping people. By contrast, those who have 'ended up' (B.01.06.W) as Social Fund Officers in Britain primarily came straight from school or from a bureaucratic background, and had mostly perceived the Civil Service, rather than 'the social' as a means to helping themselves get a secure career.¹ These different paths to their employment positions, perceived by administrators as stigmatised by the wider public, essentially contained differing degrees of choice.

¹ Most of the interviewees in Britain were long serving members of staff.

Motivations to employment

Whilst asked to make the same kinds of decisions about (the sometimes complex exceptional needs of) social assistance clients, the two sets of workers come equipped to deal with their stressful occupations with quite different personal resources.

Essentially, diverse educational and occupational backgrounds of the two sets of workers may in part be expected to affect their performance in a bureaucratic setting (Peters 1985:74). For example a professional 'helping ideology', or the lack of one, might be expected to inform their values and dispositions, influence their 'framework of meaning' (Degeling and Colebatch 1997:354) and may determine the degree to which the workers are 'pro-client' (Prottas 1979:116/117).

Recruitment

Whilst this chapter focuses primarily on the motivations to employment, educational backgrounds and organisational training, it is of course recognised that the ways in which governments go about selecting and training (either professional or bureaucratic) personnel are the ways in which they narrow the range of possible outcomes of the policy-making process (Peters 1985:74; Bradshaw 1981:141).²

For example, the municipality in which the majority of the research was conducted in the Netherlands sought specifically to recruit administrators who had a relatively high professional qualification. A case-manager was

² Although, as later chapters will illustrate, this is by no means the only way: narrowing the policy outcome can also be accomplished by requiring staff to work within a cash-limited budget.

expected to have attained a Higher Vocational Education (*HBO*³) in, for example, Social and Legal services, or to possess an equivalent level of intellectual and working ability. *HBO*'s are usually four-year courses and incorporate a year of practical work experience, for example in a Jobcentre. The majority of staff had attained either an *HBO*, a qualification in law or/and some kind of 'people-changing' (for example teaching or social work) occupation. Those responsible for recruiting case-managers expected prospective candidates would want to move on after 5 years or so. A relatively high turnover of staff was thought to be a price worth paying by the Head of Administration (HOA) in return for the professional capacities, interviewing or 'good diagnosis' skills and 'high levels of thinking', (HOA) brought to the job.

Researcher: so why do they leave after three or four years?

Uh they leave because they have a high level of education and uh they want to do something else. They are socially uh, educated, see lots of things which happens, want to be, to play a good role in the society and uh, well (after) three or four years [] they go to a higher level or they go to uh, [] to Immigration; Some go to other cities and do the same work, um some go to uh those private organisations who help people with their *trajects*. Uh, there are people who go to study again (HOA).

In Britain conversely, the majority of staff interviewed had attained O Grades and Highers, and a small minority had undertaken a year or two at university before deciding to withdraw. At the time of research, staff were recruited for the Benefit Agency office, rather than for specific Social Fund tasks. Basic grades of staff (for instance Clerical Officers) were

³ *Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs* (Higher Professional Education).

recruited both on the basis of qualifications (five O levels including English and arithmetic) and their ability to engage with 'experiential questioning', which determines how applicants rate against 'a number of competencies', for example 'teamwork, communications, and some aspect of problem solving' (Social Fund Manager) (SFM). Going up the grades appointment became competitive by qualification.

In general terms, you don't normally recruit for a particular function. You would recruit for the *office*, and then decide which function is, is needing them. [] Under equal opportunities legislation, you can't discard, em, one particular qualification against another. You must accept all the qualifications in the round. [] so, I mean in the olden days, you might have looked at someone with, an art qualification, and said well, 'I'm not really looking for that type of qualification, I'm maybe looking for a mathematical qualification'. [] but you can't do that under equal opps. legislation. [] and neither can you discriminate against someone who's *overqualified*, in perhaps your estimation. Em, 'cos I mean if I'm looking at clerical grades, in the olden days I *might have* said em, 'well, I don't think that person'll stay. Because that person is evidently overqualified' (SFM).

From a comparative perspective then there are differences both in respect of the qualifications sought, and the length of time recruiters expect staff to remain with the organisation. In this vein, the following section highlights that the Dutch administrators had often previously worked in other 'people changing' occupations, and did not rule out changing jobs in the future. In Britain in contrast, the longer-serving members of staff had either come to the Department straight from school, or from a bureaucratic background, and often made reference to their future Civil Service pension.

Choice or chance?

Bearing in mind Lipsky's (1980:xii) contention that street-level bureaucrats seek out these occupations because of their potential as socially useful roles, this section of the chapter highlights the differences in the routes to employment taken by the two sets of exceptional need administrators. From a comparative perspective these can essentially be seen to involve differing degrees of choice and chance. In the Netherlands the majority of administrators stated that a desire to help people, their previous study and their work experience had led them to seek out or apply for their positions of employment at the *Sociale Dienst*. In Britain conversely, the longer serving administrators had mostly 'seen an advert' for the Civil Service (rather than the Benefits Agency), in which they too could use their previous work experience in an office or administrative environment.

Primarily, the Dutch respondents' motivations to employment were what Clarke and Wilson might have called 'purposive' (1961:135). For instance, after their studies several staff had previously worked for a private Jobcentre and couched their move to the *Sociale Dienst* in terms of attaining an increased level of involvement with clients. Such motivations are quite in line with Lipsky's (1980) assertion that street level bureaucrats seek out their helping professions in order to perform a worthwhile role in society.

because of the interest in government and in um making things happen in society I thought I could better work here (*Sociale Dienst*) than there (private Jobcentre), because

they're all, everything is about profit and nothing about people, and um, and the things behind people (NL.01.02.M).

the contact with the people (in the Jobcentre) is very short. So they come in and you write them in and you search a job and then they are gone. And I wanted more, I wanted to be more involved with people, and um, mean something. So I can (now) help them, yeah, and offer them all kinds of things so they can be better. Or I can take them, yeah, the difficulties away so that somebody can go to ah, work or (NL.01.14.W).

I've studied a course for social and um law; it's 50% social and 50% law. Um, yeah, it's a good school for this kind of job. [] I had a placement in (a town in the UK) with the Citizens Advice Bureau. [] You have here in Holland, you have *Bureau Sociale Rights*, it's the same, and from that job, they create the school, yeah. You understand?

Researcher: yeah. So it's more to do with welfare rights and

Yes, yes. Welfare rights and um to learn to talk .. with clients. And the problems they have. (NL.02.06.W).

A further characteristic with the Dutch administrators seemed to be that, at the time of qualifying or gaining their professional qualification in law or a people changing occupation, some respondents were unable to secure employment in their chosen field. Confronted with high unemployment or tight labour markets, they had therefore used their skills or law training in a sector which might be expected to expand in such economic conditions: social security administration.

I did law studies, and (when) I graduated, at that time there was no work for a law graduate, so I went to the (Jobcentre) and they had work here. So I came here and I stayed (NL.01.13.W).

However, this was still often couched in terms of utilising an opportunity to help people.

I ha(d) studied for being a teacher, and uh, after (graduating) teacher work wasn't quite available at that time, so I was looking for something else to do in the meantime, before I could go (to work in a) school and uh, so I came here because I wanted to do, the same as in school, I wanted to work with people, with children, and so I thought in this job I could do – in a very different way but – do something with people (NL.01.06.M).

Eh, it was never a plan for me to work at social services. I wanted child protection. But it's difficult because I was ready from school when I was 22 and I was too young, actually, to do child protection. So I got here first in a department who just em. When people have debts and you try to get (them) back, and I didn't like it. I wanted more contact with clients and be able to do something for them, and this is nicer because it uh, well you really try to help people (NL.01.11.W).

In line with the recruiter's perception outlined earlier that staff would move on after a relatively short time, several administrators contended that they would not remain in their current employment position for the rest of their working life.

Not that I will work here for ever, but, it feels good, and as long as it feels good, and I got a new challenge with the case management (NL.01.04.W)

Yes, that's always fine to know that if, that I have (trained to teach). I'm not stuck here for, for the rest of my life. So, yes (NL.01.06.M).

In Britain, a desire to help people was rarely given by administrators as a reason for applying to work in the Civil Service (although, as the following chapter clearly illustrates, staff perceive that their job is to do just that). Rather, in the days of the Civil Service Commission, the longer serving members of staff had applied for what they primarily perceived at the time to be an alluring 'Civil Service' post. Being a Civil Servant was perceived as 'nice, safe and secure. Good pension, and your job was very safe and

secure' (B.02.DM1.W). In comparison to the Dutch administrators they were perhaps motivated by 'self-regarding values' (Tulloch 1997:88); attracted by the material and 'solidary' incentives (Clarke and Wilson 1961:135) of the fringe benefits of secure and relatively well rewarded employment.

When I left school I had a job in an office, applied to get into the Civil Service, um, because the Civil Service was a *good job*, you know? Promotions, steady work. Along with like banking. It was the sort of thing you went in for if you didn't want to be a teacher or a doctor or something like that. If you didn't go to university, you'd kind of fall back on the Civil Service (B.01.DM6.W).

My dad said (the Civil Service) would be a great job, he said it would be wonderful [] I wished I'd never believed him! (laughs). No, um, it was just office work I wanted to do, um, and this was the first job that had kinda come up (B.01.CS1.W).

As the latter quotes highlight, like their Dutch counterparts, several of the British administrators also saw the Civil Service as a chance to utilise their previous work experience in a banking or office environment.

I'd worked with (a high street bank) prior to that. [] and I got transferred to (another place), and I was having to meet expenses. And the travelling at the time was having an effect as well [] So I saw the advert (for the Civil Service) (B.01.DM5.M)

Even for the shorter serving members of staff who had knowingly applied for employment positions in the Benefits Agency, it is still the perception of office or administrative work that attracts them to the job.

I just saw the job at the Jobcentre. Em, it was actually the Jobcentre that had said to me, em, that if I was interested.

And at that time, at that point, there wasn't a lot of clerical work going about, and I didn't really know if I wanted to do anything else. I always, I've always worked, within an office environment. I mean before hand it was em, doing accounts [] So when they said that this had come up. And, needs must as well (B.01.BL.W).

As seen, the Dutch administrators had often sought out an increased level of involvement with social assistance clients at the *Sociale Dienst*, which, (as the following chapter illustrates) is perceived as being for people who have more than financial problems. The majority of Social Fund Officers however recounted that in the days of the Civil Service Commission, they had effectively been recruited into the Civil Service not knowing which Department they would subsequently be sent to work in. Significantly, whilst the officers had been able to give a preference for which department they would like to work, in no instance had this been for the NAB/DHSS/DSS, where they had eventually been placed. It would seem that of all the departments available to Civil Servants, 'the social' is perceived as that with the least status.

Unlike staff in (what were perceived to be) less demanding and more prestigious Government Departments, Social Fund staff stressed that, as Howe (1985) also found, they were not able to sit and drink tea or coffee all day.

People think we just sit here and drink coffee, they don't realise. There *are* Civil Servants that do that, but they're away up there (motions above her head). I mean, the social security is the pits. It's the worst, it's the lowest department, I mean that's the one that nobody ever puts they want (to work in on the form).

Researcher: do you think so?

Oh yeah, nobody wants it. I mean I ticked I wanted to work in Agriculture and Fisheries, and then, well, there was three that I ticked and this wasn't one. But this. It's the easiest Department to get into, and the hardest one to get out of. That's how the DSS, well that's how it's known.

Researcher: is it, is it known like that throughout?

It's known like that, yeah. Easiest to get into and the hardest to get out of (B.02.DM1.W).

When I actually attended for my interview, you didn't. You had a choice, it was like Inland Revenue, eh, Social. Benefits. Well it wasn't Benefits Agency then; Supplementary Benefits, that sort of thing. Um, so you had a choice, and I don't think I. Mines was the fourth tick for this place. But basically, after you got through the interview, they just allocated you a place to go, and I was allocated here (B.01.DM6.W).

I think it was in one of the papers or something 'join the Civil Service – a career for you' and all that sort of stuff [] I sat the Civil Servant's exam, and I got posted to, what it was then called -you're far too young to remember of course - the National Assistance Board. [] It could have been any Department. Just picked it out the hat 'National Assistance Board', [] so, yeah, I started and I thought 'I'll try this 'till I find something better', as you do (laughs) [] I just started until I could find something more rewarding and ha ha, yeah (laughs) there you go. [] So. They're not issuing any packages at the moment, so I'll have to soldier on 'till I'm sixty I'm afraid (B.01.DM3.M).

Just as many of the long serving administrators would not have chosen to work at 'the social', once in they stated that they had 'ended up' in the Social Fund section because they had been 'picked' to do it when the scheme was introduced in 1988, or had subsequently been 'put' or 'moved' there.

Well, I was on the counter; it was just a natural progression. At one point the counter was staffed by my grade because there were too many of us. And then when we got enough of

the other grades, they had to find jobs, so, I was just put to Social Fund. .. are you asking me that question in the realms of did I choose it? (To work in the Social Fund section)

Researcher: yes.

No! (laughs)

Researcher: right.

But, I'm very much of the opinion: they can put me where they want, I'm not. I'd really. I'd no particular interest, and no particular dislike of it. [] never really. Don't particularly think it's the job for me, but I've never found my true vocation, that could afford to pay me. So I'm still here. I've got a pension. (pauses) You get used to, your job (01.DM1.W).

Social Fund started in 1988, and we were just basically chosen. It was just a case of whatever jobs were available, they hand-picked so many people to start it off. [] I've been doing different jobs on and off, but I always seem to end up back at Social Fund (01.DM6.W).

In sum, there are differences both in the degree to which the two sets of administrators purposely chose to work in 'the social'/ *Sociale Dienst*, and the personal resources (i.e. from their education and previous employment) they subsequently brought with them to their jobs. Such differences also have implications for the amount of job satisfaction the two sets of administrators enjoy and, as the following chapter illustrates, perceptions of their clientele.

Relatively speaking, British administrators were less likely to say that they enjoyed their jobs, more likely to complain that their pay was insufficient, that they were under-funded, understaffed and, as the following section illustrates, that their organisational training was inadequate.

Training

Confirming earlier research (Elmore 1997:251), both sets of administrators stated that their jobs were stressful and challenging. There were differences however, in the administrative perceptions of the organisational training they had received to equip, or help them deal with threatening and stressful situations. Staff perceptions of the adequacy of training are not insignificant when we consider that the administrators were dealing regularly with very vulnerable people who might themselves be experiencing stressful or harrowing situations. Apart from the stress associated with having insufficient or no money, instances of illness, death, divorce, separation and abuse are all situations in which social assistance beneficiaries may request an exceptional payment.

In the Netherlands the majority of administrators, especially in the main municipality of research, stated that they had received adequate training. Each had undergone a three-month in-house training course before finally being assessed for their suitability for employment.⁴ The training comprises of (national and municipal) social security law; training in computer systems and how to communicate/deal with clients.

There is a very good education programme upstairs. So you um, have a solicitation in which they ask you tough questions, and then three months of education on the second floor here, in a special space, and then the first six weeks are a lot of the social welfare law. The law for other social um, you not only need the social welfare, you've got all the pension things; when you're sick: Which comes when and how and what? [] and then you have communication, and special payments, and all the other things we have (NL.01.04.W).

⁴ On average, 2 or 3 from 15 trainees 'don't make the end' (Head of Administration) of the three month period.

Once 'put downstairs' as they termed it, the new recruit had a named mentor for between six months and a year, which the majority considered very helpful.

For the first (six months downstairs) you get a mentor so you don't have to do it alone. If you have questions then you can ask them. And he is sitting next to you doing his own job, but, you can ask him, you can always ask him. And the reason we do that is to prevent that someone is drowning here! (NL.01.06.M).

However, many perceived that no amount of training could quite prepare them for what they would subsequently meet 'downstairs'. The diversity of clients and their situations however, were often offered by administrators as factors that made their jobs interesting and challenging.

I think it more depends on the person you are, on the qualities you have [] than on the training, because everybody can learn about the law, what the law says (NL.02.01.W).

When you come downstairs you're always (participant mimics a gaping stare of disbelief) .. It's all new to you, but you get very much training in social capabilities uh, how you (do) interviews with people, with aggression. Yes, and you have to learn the legislation, and the computer. So yes. (NL.01.10.W).

The most I've learned to do the job .. just by doing the job. And to speak with a lot of people, because you can try role-playing interactions (in training) yes. But it isn't real. The people who are coming here react always different .. There isn't a standard for it [] I am changed [] the way I speak to people, it's uh, you are so much growing with these people, you always have a mirror in front of you, and you learn a lot from the job [] about uh other people and about uh, uh how to react at, how to react at people and em, uh people are reacting to me. I think it's uh, everyone goes through that. (NL.01.16.W).

In Britain in contrast, rather than completing a relatively comprehensive training period before starting work, several staff perceived that their training was inadequate and inappropriately timed.⁵ For instance, staff perceived that what they considered to be essential training often came after they had been doing their job for a period of time. Similarly, staff had often been temporarily promoted, ('TP'd' as they often termed it) to a more responsible position before they had been formally trained for it.

(Discussing training for making decisions on Crisis Loan applications) I never really had much training as such because I was only like temporary promoted. I sat in a couple of times, em, and then I was really just left to my own devices, because it's a discretionary. Em, I had a, I've got examples, I still have examples of the other em, B3's decisions that I like to refer to, just to help myself, if not then I just ask advice on that, so there wasn't really any training as such apart from my past experience being in the section and em, dealing with the Crisis Loans from the other side - actually information gathering []

(Discussing training for (Crisis Loan) interviewing techniques) Em, I was desk trained on that. Em, sat with somebody and came out and listened while somebody else did it. I must admit the first time doing it yourself's scary (laughs). But em, that, that was basically the training for that. Em, desk training and just listening to what everybody else said, and how they dealt with the customers. I did get sent on a face to face interviewing course. Em, that was two days up in (a town) where you were em, given different scenarios, and how to deal with, yeah. Your attitude has a lot to do with how. *Your* attitude towards a customer, can be the difference between them getting angry and being ok, yeah (B.01.BL.W).

⁵ This is not to undermine the detailed knowledge of the organisation and other benefits that those longer serving members of staff, in their previous roles, had accrued.

Many of the longer serving members of staff also remembered the initial training for the Social Fund scheme when it was first introduced, and recounted it as inadequate.⁶

I went on a training course for the Social Fund, which is about the worst training course I've ever been on in my life, it was pretty [] absolutely awful. They were saying things like eh, it was sort of money advice, you were supposed to offer money advice to customers then, how to you know, manage your income. The advice we were to give customers then was 'don't shop when you're hungry'. I mean, customers on benefit are always going to be hungry I would think, 'don't shop when you're hungry, 'cos you'll buy stuff you'll not probably eat', it was crazy, absolutely crazy course (B.01.DM3.M).

One of the shorter serving members of staff recounted how her training course for Social Fund decision-makers included an informal education in how to cope with the stress of working under a limited budget: be 'cynical', and use 'black comedy'.

When I was at my training course, the people that were there had all been promoted to EO's: I was a direct entrant. They had *all*, at some stage been decision-makers em, in offices acting up (temporarily promoted), and then they'd been promoted. And they would talk about customers (gives a heavy sigh) you know, and I thought 'that's not very nice'.

Researcher: they would talk about them in a cynical or a derogatory way?

A derogatory way. Em, also when they were going through decisions, 'cos we'd have mock decisions to make, you know, going through decisions and saying 'they won't get that, and they won't get that. And they won't get that'. And I though, 'oh, that's not very fair', and we had discussions about it, bringing me into it, and they said 'well, you'll discover that it's not that easy. There's lots of reasons why', and I don't know whether I'm getting cynical, I hope not, but I

⁶ In the same vein many thought that the fund itself had been introduced with little thought.

now know where they're coming from, because when you deal with these forms, certain people, and not by any means all. This is where I find it hard, because there are so many genuine ones, and you can't give them, because you don't have the money, and I find it, and they don't qualify, and I find it so so difficult. It's very stressful, I mean we have a really good laugh, in a black comedy kind of way, and if anybody could hear us! But it's really, that's the way you deal with it (B.03.DM2.W).

Such organisational coping mechanisms seem to be essential requirements for Social Fund Officers. Staff often recounted harrowing incidents that had either taken place in the office or that they had read about on application forms. Essentially perhaps, in comparison to the Dutch administrators, Social Fund staff were being asked to deal with situations/client groups that they may have relatively little training for, or insight into.

em, there's people slit their wrists (in the office).

Researcher: oh no.

Somebody (a colleague) was interviewing. I mean it was only kid on, 'cos they (participant motions up arms rather than across them) went that way instead of that way, but you get that kind of thing, yeah.

Researcher: what are they doing that for?

Attention? Blackmail? 'If you don't pay me I'll, I'll slit my wrists'. 'Yeah go'n then'. And, occasionally, you get people leaving kids: we just phone the social work.

Researcher: they leave their kids here?

Mhm.

Researcher: what for?

'Well, you feed them'. If they get a knockback, I mean they use them. Well children, often children get used as a blackmailer: they're a means to money (B.01.DM1.W).

As seen then, there were differences in the skills and resources that the two sets of administrators brought to their jobs. Moreover, there was found to be differences in their motivations to employment, which can be seen to question Lipsky's (1980) assertion that all street-level bureaucrats seek out their helping professions.

'I don't tell people where I work'

The following section illustrates however, that there were also remarkable similarities in that the two sets of administrators perceived that the (local and municipal) offices they worked in were stigmatised by the public. This perception was so strong that administrators often voiced a reticence to 'own up' or 'admit' to their occupations.

In keeping perhaps with working in a liberal welfare regime, staff in Britain perceived that they had a reputation for being 'stingy' people

(I say) I work in the Benefits Agency. Don't go into any details or anything! But a lot of (staff) don't even want to say that, you know? I usually say 'I work in the Benefits Agency' and they think 'oh'. Em, because a lot of people have got perceptions of what you do in the Benefits Agency [] they just think of 'Bread' and this woman who used to sit (in reception), [] 'oh you're like that woman in bread'. 'No I hope not!' (B.01.CSM.W).

In the Netherlands some of the workers perceived that the wider public considered staff employed in the public sector (in line with the New Right's discourse) inefficient.

You have to work very hard [] but [] you hear at parties 'you (work for) a local service so you are 'oh it's four o'clock, I have to go home'. (You) work from nine to four and you go []

drop everything you have in your hand, and you go home'.
But that's not true (NL.01.13.W).

In keeping with Lødemel's (1997) argument of municipal social assistance provision being the more liberal element of a generous income maintenance system, staff further (and frequently) voiced that they often faced criticism of their clients from friends and family, or from people they met at parties, where accusations of 'working with the enemy' were levied at them. They felt that they often had to spend time defending their clients – primarily perceived as 'lazy people and foreigners'⁷, - by explaining that not everybody committed fraud or that some people were not able to work.

(when I tell people that I work at the *Sociale Dienst*, I)
always get a reaction from them! 'People who are having
welfare they are lazy', or 'there is coming only black people'.
They uh, they don't know what it's about. (NL.01.16.W).

they say 'oh they can go to work. They always keep their
hand open for money, when they can go to work'
(NL.02.04.W).

or people tell me 'it's only foreign people that ask for money',
something like that (NL.02.06.W).

In Britain conversely, local offices were perceived by administrators to be stigmatised essentially because they constituted a 'horrible place to come to'. Partly, the reasons for this perception can be found in the inverse of

⁷ Migrants are over represented among the long-term unemployed in the Netherlands (Spies and Berkel 2001:110).

Lødemel's argument for Norway: local offices in Britain are not only for the 'people with problems'. Thus in 'the social' the major theme seemed to be that the people seeking only money: pensioners or people signing sick for the first time, were 'thrown in' at the initial reception area with those whom the administrators referred to as the 'regulars' the 'troublemakers' and the 'hardnuts' who were perceived by administrators to demand their rights loudly and aggressively.

You don't tell many people you work in the social [] it's a horrible place to come to.

Researcher: for?

For anybody, um, Jobcentre Plus is going to change all this (participant looks at tape recorder, gives a silent laugh, hand over mouth) em, but just the whole atmosphere in the office. For people who are *genuinely in need of benefits*, they come in and half of them have never been here before, you know. And it's quite daunting to come in, and there's all the screens and there's all the people who are sitting effing and blinding (B.01.CS1.W).

This theme was especially in respect of the 'elderly deserving' who administrators perceived were 'frightened out of their wits' at having to sit in what could often be a volatile reception area.

I don't know if you've had the chance to sit out on the counter?

Researcher: no, I haven't.

That would be an eye opener for you, just to sit, and just listen. It's. It's disgu- I feel really. The ones that I feel heart sorry for are like your widowers, your pensioners, people who are maybe signing sick for the first time: and they see the *junkies* and the druggies that are practically doing their deals at the front *door* (B.O1.DM1.W).

We get the little old woman that comes in after them and she'll say 'oh, I've been sitting out there with all these,

smackheads or whatever they call them'. Um and it's a shame. It's a shame that these people, that, out *there* (in reception) you can't just sit and be like in a surgery waiting room, for your name being called out or whatever. It's eh, fights break out, you've got kids *screeching*, you've got them shouting and. We've had everything out there from them actually using the hypodermics: we've had them lying on the floor. I mean there's children there too, so it's. I don't know (B.O1.DM2.W).

Disclosing their occupation depended very much on the social context participants found themselves in. Essentially both sets of workers spoke of assessing any given social situation in terms of whether they were likely to be considered a source of valuable information (and thus barraged for information on the benefits system) or a target of complaint. Similarly, sometimes quite literally, administrators feared revealing their occupation to someone who was on benefit.

I *won't* tell them what Department, very rarely. [] because, if you say you work for the social, they think 'she's a grass. She wants to find out what I'm doing so she can'. I mean people might be working on the side. So as soon as you say 'I work for the DSS', that's it (B.O2.DM1.W).

If it's people I know who don't know me *awful* well, but I know *of* them and I know what they're like then, and I've got a good idea they *aren't* on benefits then, it's ok, I just say I work for the Benefits Agency. Em, but other than that I just say 'oh, I work in (town 4) in an office', and just move on the conversation. 'Cos I've been in situations, where, you know, the minute people find out, they're right in there (makes an aggressive growling noise) (B.O1.DM6.W).

In the Netherlands administrators who might have any form of contact with clients were similarly reticent to reveal their occupation.

uh, no. I don't tell many people when I .. for instance at a birthday party.. I'm not so open in it that I (will say) this is my job. Because many times there are people (there and)

they get the benefits.. and uh, I don't want them to know that I am working here, because then I get many questions about fraud, and those kinds of things or if they are living together, or what else, and I think well, I'm not working now, it's my party.

Researcher: they want to ask you questions about?

yea, what they can use, what they can do, and also they sometimes .. they are making fraud in it, and then they say 'well then she knows me so maybe she is going to get me into it (trouble) or something' .. when I meet people who have a job, and I'm sure they have a job and I'm in a conversation then I will go (into it) more (laughs).. some people from those neighbourhoods .. when the (whole) street is in *uitkering* .. are very negative about social services..(NL.01.12.W) .

I mostly say I'm working for the municipality [] . Um because the job I do, for myself I think it's a very good job, it's a nice job, I .. otherwise I don't stick to it .. but a lot of people have something about 'oh are you doing that job, oh oh oh ! ' .. and so I don't tell them.. ..it's never a nice situation when you meet somebody (getting benefit) from this office.. (NL.02.03.W)

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated differences in the degree to which administrators in the two countries under study had sought out their positions of employment because of their potential as socially useful or worthwhile roles (Lipsky 1980). Such findings are significant when we consider Peters' (1985:90) link between the requirements of social change and the public or personal motivations - and commitments - of the administrators being recruited to bring about that change.

As seen, the longer serving members of staff in the Social Fund had no particular desire to work in the Department for Work and Pensions. Rather they initially perceived the Civil Service as a secure and steady

job with good fringe benefits and would have preferred to have worked in (what they perceived to be) a more prestigious Department like Agriculture and Fisheries or the Inland Revenue. The Dutch administrators on the other hand, had previously completed a period of law or/and 'people changing' study. They often couched their move to the 'stigmatised' *Sociale Dienst* as being deliberately designed both to enable them to utilise their previous study and attain an increased level of involvement with social assistance clients and their 'problems'.

A particularly striking point from a comparative perspective is the difference observed in the educational (professional/bureaucratic) backgrounds of the two sets of workers. In sum, administrators in both countries may be thought to command quite different personal and professional resources. These, in turn, may go some way to informing their discretionary decision making about social assistance beneficiaries with similar and complex needs.

The following chapters present a comparative analysis of the meanings which the administrators attach to their behaviour in their welfare structures (Barrett and Fudge 1981:7), and respond to the exceptional needs of clients: with similar characteristics⁸, needs and problems. These meanings must be firmly grounded in the workers understandings of what they perceive they are there to do with, for or to their clients and customers with exceptional payments.

⁸ As outlined in chapter 4 in the contextual validity of vignettes presented to administrators.

Chapter 6 Organisational contexts: administrative concerns, methods and constraints

This chapter situates the two sets of administrators in their specific and particular organisational contexts. As chapter 2 argued, along with the educational backgrounds of workers outlined in the previous chapter, the structure and goals of an organisation are assumed to go some way to informing discretionary decision making. Essentially the chapter highlights administrative perceptions of the constraints arising from a 'paternalistic' (Mead 1997) context of welfare administration in which workers are concerned with changing the behaviour of their clients in the Netherlands, and a 'Managerial' (Clarke and Newman 1997) context which sees the administrator concerned to process a large number of applicants in Britain.

In the degree to which they structure and constrain the workers' discretionary behaviour (Elmore 1997:246), diverse organisational contexts both present themselves to, and are experienced by, staff as 'horizons of possibilities' (Emerson and Paley 1992:246) which stipulate the principles and procedures by which administrators must 'look for, find and display adequate argumentation for their decisions' (Knegt 1987:123). The chapter argues that the contexts inform the major administrative points of reference for awarding an exceptional payment and subsequently generate conflicting goals for the administrators who must either meet exceptional need whilst activating beneficiaries, or whilst managing a budget. The resultant tension must be worked out by them on the ground, and,

significantly affect decisions about 'who should get what and why' (van Oorschot 2000).

'Helping people'

Different configurations of social assistance in the two countries notwithstanding, from within their welfare state as a workplace, the two sets of administrators voiced an indistinguishable common purpose or concern: to help people in need who had nowhere else to go. The workers thus perceived that they were, in the eyes of their clients, the last resort. That said, their respective welfare configurations could clearly be seen to influence administrative understandings of what they were trying to help people with, or do. In the Netherlands, perceptions of 'the Municipality (as) the last resort for income' (NL.01.01.M) are very much like the theoretical conceptualisation of social assistance: the last form of income maintenance for those in need, or without any other means of subsistence (Ditch et al. 1997:3). Following Lødemel (1997), the *Sociale Dienst*, and by extension social assistance provision, was (as the previous chapter suggested) further considered to be for people perceived to have more than financial 'problems'.

It's the final um, organisation, the end station. If there is really nothing else, then you go to the *Sociale Dienst*. So there are a lot of problems (that) they have: the clients (NL.02.06.W).

In contrast, the fragmented nature of the social assistance scheme in Britain meant that those who administered the Social Fund, whilst situated in a local Social Security Office, or, as they termed it 'the social' (which as outlined in

chapter 3 is a point of contact for social insurance as well as social assistance beneficiaries), considered themselves as working in a hived off 'section', the 'loans and grants department' (B.O1.CO.W). The 'last resort' in this configuration is not social assistance per se. Rather, the 'Social Fund section' is the last port of call for social assistance beneficiaries requiring help with 'one-off' expenses or needs.

I would describe it as a section that helped people, in you know, a one off situation. Where they've got a large expense, that they couldn't fund themselves, and it was a necessity that they had it. And if you're on income support, you can't get credit anywhere. [] so therefore the people that we're helping can't get the money anywhere else [] we're the last resort, we're like the bank of England: the lender of last resort! (B.O2.DM1.W).

Last resort: safety net or trampoline?

As outlined previously in chapters 2 and 3, both countries may be thought of as having 'workfare' social assistance schemes: theoretically conceptualised as trampolines, which aim to bounce 'dependent' social assistance beneficiaries (back) into the labour market, by compelling them to become self-sufficient (Lødemel and Trickey 2001:2). As the following section illustrates however, whilst *Bijzondere Bijstand* is explicitly used by the municipal administrator as a policy implement in this respect, the discretionary part of the 'hived off' Social Fund, as a safety net for the most vulnerable, is not. Comparatively speaking, this leads the Dutch administrators to take a relatively wide perspective of any given client's exceptional need in the context of labour market and/or social activation. The Social Fund Officer's focus on the other hand is far narrower,

charged as they are with targeting exceptional payments on 'those most in need'. Concomitantly, diverse administrative perceptions of what they try to help people with, or do to people with these payments, can be situated near opposing ends of the 'people changing'-'people processing' theoretical continuum outlined in chapter 2, and structure the degree to which they regard 'changes in a client's behaviour (in a desired direction) important' (Lipsky 1980:59) when deciding upon an exceptional need application.

The Netherlands: 'Trying to get the client to'

Charged with administering a 'workfare', or more appropriately an 'activity fare'¹ social assistance scheme, Dutch administrators voiced a concern to 'help' their clients 'get out' of social assistance and achieve self-reliance. Whilst Social Fund staff in their 'encapsulated' (03.DM2.W) section are not formally charged with ensuring that beneficiaries meet any stated behavioural 'obligations' for the condition of social assistance, or directly involved with administering any other aspect of a client's overall income levels², the Dutch *consulents* and case-managers considered that beneficiaries' obligations were just as important as their rights to an income from the Municipality.

Concomitantly, the *consulents* and case-managers perceived that, broadly speaking, their functions entailed both deciding on, as well as supervising the

¹ Where as said, education, training and voluntary work were seen as important in getting clients to the labour market.

² Although, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, they were 'concerned' about them.

'balance in between' their set caseload of clients' 'rights and obligations' (NL.01.12.W). On the ground, balancing the rights and obligations of any given client, or in effect administering social assistance as a trampoline as well a safety net, meant that administrators considered themselves to be performing a 'dual role'. They provided clients with an income, which included adjudications of any discretionary benefit applied for, and at the same time encouraged clients to take part in an activity fare.

I work with people who need the welfare, and em, there are two things in that. First I have to make sure that they get every month the money that they have the right to, and on the other side I have to try to get them to school or to get them to a job (NL.01.06.M).

I help people who are needy, uh well to get to work, or to get a better education (and) from there go to work. Or when people (are) not able to work, uh well to supply social assistance, because then it's necessary. I try to get them *out* of social assistance to work, education, or to work for free (NL.01.09.M).

Processing beneficiaries' monthly benefit forms (posted to the office by clients), and making sure clients get their benefit or as they termed it, '*uitkering*', could be accomplished by the administrator via the computer system. Attempting to get clients out of social assistance however, in effect incurred the administrator trying to change their clients' attitude and/or behaviour (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:240) and required a different set of technologies, one of which, as will be highlighted, was *Bijzondere Bijstand*, or exceptional payments.

As we might expect in the context of an activity fare (and given the educational backgrounds of the Dutch administrators highlighted in the previous chapter), the emphasis given to changing the behaviour of clients by case-managers and *consulents*, was, in part, underpinned by a relatively sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of new, or modern poverty (Leisering and Walker 1998). Nevertheless, administrators perceived that structural barriers to the labour market, lack of human capital, or a mismatch between labour supply and demand were essentially to be overcome by focusing on the individual client's problems and/or behaviour.³

The client group has come a lot smaller, and the people in the centre (hard-core unemployed) well, they are the people with the problems. If they're not out now (then) they don't get out very soon. A lot of employers are saying 'well, how is it possible that we have about 100,000 unemployed people in the Netherlands, and we have 100,000 vacancies?' 'Well, they don't match', that's the simple answer: they don't match, really. And the (clients) have to be trained to get matched in those jobs (NL.01.02.M).

Consulents and case-managers therefore voiced a concern to 'try to get the client' to move through a number of stages which would better prepare them for labour market participation by investing them with social skills, knowledge, and job seeking guidance (Spies and van Berkel 2001:125). Essentially, the workers attempted to steer, guide, and/or coax the client as far away from social assistance dependency, and as near to self-sufficiency as possible. In effect, the

³ It is this focus on clients' behaviour and attitude in the context of an 'activity fare' social assistance provision, that leads Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:138) to argue that all ideologies of 'Workfare' ultimately arise, and derive their legitimacy, from the same dominant rule that views poverty as a 'personal' rather than a social deficit.

'paternalistic' administrator 'attempted to reduce poverty and other social problems by directive and supervisory means' of implementation (Mead 1997:2). The administrative perception, in line with the basic assumption of the casework method, was that the client could almost always do something about his or her problem (Handler 1979:20), and in the frame of obligations and rights, had to do something about it. Crucially, these enforcement or regulatory functions that administrators brought to bear on a client, the administration of 'tough love' (Shragge 1997:19), also claimed to 'serve the poor themselves' (Mead 1997:22). Interference with a clients behaviour was often justified by claims that the individual concerned, by being encouraged to get off welfare, was 'being made to act for their own welfare' (Lively 1983).

I have to see it (in this case the client's 'debt problem') and when I see it I have to be doing something with it. I have to say: 'you have to go to social work, you can't do this on your own'. They have to make their appointment themselves, but I have to, it's my responsibility to point them at, that they have a way to be helped. They have to make a move to go to social work, and then they can go further on, and the big, the most important point now is work, or education, or voluntary work [] to make them able to make themselves employable, and self sufficient (NL.01.04.W).

While the latter concern to get beneficiaries to the labour market was very pervasive, without exception the workers also perceived that some of their clients, those with severe social, physical or psychological problems or unemployed people aged over 58, would not be expected ever to attain complete self-sufficiency. Obligations for these clients, where voiced by administrators,

translated to participating in neighbourhood groups, where they could talk with people in a similar situation to themselves and thus avoid social isolation.

The organisational goals of activating clients, either socially and/or to the labour market, clearly informed a categorisation and separation of clients into those thought (at some future point) able to work, and those perceived as not able or expected to work.

Some people couldn't help if they are not working, because there are a lot of situations, em, some people are not capable for um to work. So, uh, like their living must be, as, we must try to give them a life as good as we can (NL.01.16.W).

Giving the latter clients a 'life as good as we can' (NL.01.16.W) depends in part, on the administrative definition of a good life for a(n impotent) social assistance beneficiary (see chapters 7 and 8). For the present discussion, the latter participant's quote highlights that the division of impotent/able-bodied social assistance clients is of paramount importance for the administrator when deciding on any given applicant's exceptional need request. Whilst the non-able bodied or the 'morally pure': thought to have little control over their poverty, should be socially activated, those not 'morally excused from work' (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:20), the able bodied, had to be encouraged, or as the workers termed it, 'motivated' to become self sufficient and leave the municipal welfare roll.

It is in this context that the 'activity fare' administrator decides upon discretionary decisions regarding exceptional need. Exceptional payments are thus inextricably linked to what they try to do with their clients and *Bijzondere Bijstand* is an explicit tool of implementation in this respect.

For clients thought unable to work and thus to have little control over their situation, the relief of misery, or activating them socially with a exceptional payment, was not contradicted by the administrative need to 'uphold the work ethic' (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:37). For those categorised and classed by the administrator as (soon) able to work however, exceptional payments were explicitly used as a 'lever to ensure compliance' (Mead 1997:5); as a technology or an implement to 'people-change'. The basis of eligibility for an exceptional payment then only partly depended on the 'need' presented by the applicant. Reforming the individual was just as much a goal for those administering *Bijzondere Bijstand* to the able bodied.

Subsequently, case-managers and *consulents* considered whether or not the payment would get or encourage the able-bodied client to work, and/or whether the client was perceived to be acting 'responsibly', or fulfilling their reciprocal obligations for the receipt of social assistance (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:201). The work seeking behaviour and/or attitude of clients who are not morally excused from paid labour participation then becomes both explicit and central to the discretionary decision.

(We) do something for the person: we expect the person to do something for us, and eh in the longer run for himself (NL.01.02.M).

However, the workers perceived that not all of their clients wanted to do something for either themselves or the administrator, which can be seen to question one of the central legitimising arguments for paternalistic social policies. For example, Mead (1997) contends that the administrative influence brought to bear on social assistance beneficiaries merely steers the client in the direction they would want to go if they only knew the route to take. Long term social assistance beneficiaries assert that they want to work, but their behaviour continually fails to match their stated aspirations. They are not therefore being compelled to do something that they do not want to do, or something alien to them. Rather, social assistance beneficiaries simply now 'have to do what they always wanted to do' (Mead 1997:64). This contention however, only partly resonated with those that are charged with activating clients to the labour market in the Netherlands, and administrators continually stressed the importance of a 'motivated client', and of 'motivating clients'.

From their point of view it was far easier to work with, to supervise, direct, and oversee the transition of a 'motivated' social assistance beneficiary to a potential worker. The motivated client is one who, ashamed to be in and therefore eager to get out of social assistance, 'works with' the case-manager or *consulent* and who actively complies with the administrator by participating in their reinsertion *traject*. The latter clients display an attitude of reciprocity: they 'want to do something

back' for the administrator and the Municipality in return for aid. Much like the paternalistic conceptualisation of beneficiaries outlined above, the motivated client is perceived by administrators to want out of social assistance, but, alienated from the world of work for a long period of time, inhabits what Engbersen (1989:78/79) refers to as a 'conformist⁴ culture of unemployment' and can not quite accomplish this on his or her own. Such clients

wants to get out, but they really don't know how or what (to do). It shakens peoples lives when they try to get out. You can imagine if someone is already ten years unemployed the life is, um the life is different from the life that you and I know: about getting up at seven o'clock. Why should they get up at seven o'clock? (NL.01.02.M)

Furthermore, administrators recognised that such clients' 'problems' were often intricately connected and not easily surmounted in the short term.

Money problems: they have to pay debts, and uh psychological problems, yes, a lot. [] and alcohol problems, and when somebody has for 28 years a drugs problem it's not easy to (get them to work) (NL.01.05.W).

Essentially, administrators perceived that 'conformist' clients showed willing, wanted to change their 'lifestyle problems⁵' and were motivated enough to take the advice/prescribed solutions of the administrator. Other clients however were not considered to be at all 'motivated', were thought to exhibit a less than

⁴ Engbersen (1989) makes the distinction between 'conformist cultures of unemployment' where beneficiaries look for work, and an 'enterprising/calculated' culture of unemployment, in which beneficiaries have made rational decisions to remain (fraudulently) unemployed.

⁵ Administrators were often concerned with the 'rhythm' of such beneficiaries days: staying up late to watch television, and getting up late in the morning.

reciprocal attitude, and resist every step of the way back to the labour market. In keeping with descriptions of the Netherlands' income maintenance system as social democratic (Goodin et al 1999) and the argument that associated understandings of poverty are largely structural rather than personal (Ditch et al 1997:39) workers perceived that some of their clients could be better described as the 'calculating or the enterprising unemployed' (Engbersen 1989: 78/79).

You have to work a lot with people who are angry, or who do not want to work with you and don't want to get a job, and only want money from the government and nothing else (NL.01.05.W).

Some people don't want to get out (of social assistance) because they're involved in crime um, and they use the *Bijstand* only as an income for taxes. Uh, and some people, well, they work, they work (on the) black (labour market) (NL.01.02.M).

The Dutch administrators thus claimed to be charged with changing or altering the behaviour of a diverse group of social assistance beneficiaries with 'fears, problems, or escape routes' (NL.01.04.W). Effectively, this meant that

You have to motivate people the right way or the bad way (NL.01.02.M)

In line with what Mead (1997) terms a 'paternalistic' approach, motivating beneficiaries the 'right way or the bad way' incurred the administrator fine-tuning the balance between the client's rights and their obligations; between the amounts of 'help and hassle' (Mead 1997:61) administered in an attempt to oversee the transition to a job ready client. Clients considered as 'difficult' or 'not

motivated' were perceived to require far more influence or time and effort on the part of the administrator. Beneficiaries, who reneged on their obligations by dropping out of classes for example, had to be pursued by the case-manager or *consulent*.

If everything goes well and the people from the (private organisation who implement the client's trajectory to the labour market) say, 'well, it's going very well', you don't have to see the client. But if they say 'well, he's not coming, or it's not going very well, then you have to invite the client in to talk about this' (NL.01.05.W).

'Talking about this' with the client, was sometimes referred to as trying to motivate clients by emphasising the social contract, which is inherent in paternalistic social policies. Participants were often reminded that they had a responsibility to satisfy certain behavioural requirements, such as staying in their *traject* to receive aid. Administrators reported that they often pointed out the consequences for clients should they fail to meet the expected behavioural expectations.

So you say to the client: 'if you don't go (to the training/*traject*) then you get less money (by way of a benefit sanction). Otherwise you are trying to stress their responsibility: 'everybody has to work, you have to earn your own money, uh this (the municipality) is the last station' (NL.01.05.W).

Thus, as Mead (1997:5) argues, paternalist income programmes, and concomitantly those who administered these payments, were concerned to use the 'benefits on which people depended as a lever to ensure compliance'. Ultimately however the administrators' perception was that they could not force

an unmotivated beneficiary to work. Enforcing 'mandatory welfare to work programmes' was therefore seen as a major difficulty with those clients perceived not to want to work (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996: 235). This difficulty was often compounded for the *consulent* (but not for the case-manager) because of their frequently changing and often high caseloads, which effectively meant that developing long standing or in-depth client-administrative relationships was sometimes difficult. Such barriers or constraints should not be underestimated in militating against the policy aim of 'helping' or activating people to the labour market. Where resource and/or time constraints were perceived as an issue, some staff choose to 'cream' off the best or 'compliant' clients (Lipsky 1980), i.e. those who were motivated and wanted to work

If somebody doesn't want to work (then) that's difficult uh, I don't put energy into that sort of people. I think if you have 225 clients you must put your energy into the people who wants to work, and not too much energy in the people who doesn't want to. Because, it takes very much time to make (a) report (about) those kinds of people, and uh, I can put my energy in other clients (NL.01.07.W).

The latter 'kinds of people' moreover, elicited a particular tension for the administrator when it came to a request for an exceptional payment. As Trickey (2001:289) points out, the concern to elicit both 'care and control' over the 'able-bodied poor' means that the 'workfare' or in this case activity fare administrator must at the same time 'perform a social work and a policing role' with such beneficiaries. In effect, as the following participant's quote illustrates, having two conflicting goals, trying to relieve misery with an exceptional need payment whilst

maintaining the work ethic of clients who were perceived 'not to want out of social assistance' was

something that every colleague of mine has to grapple with, because, on the one hand you try to get them as independable as possible, and on the other hand you make them very dependable because uh, you give them money (NL.01.O2.M).

This tension was worked out case by case. Ultimately, staff perceived that,

It can't be that easy to apply for something and you get it, you know? (NL.01.05.W).

As chapter 7 will illustrate, whilst administrators perceived that they could not physically force such beneficiaries to work or to change their behaviour and/or attitude, they could chastise or try to encourage them with an exceptional payment.

The degree of discretion, or the administrative possibilities that arise from this paternalistic welfare configuration in the Netherlands include a deal of choice 'to give or not to give' (NL.01.12.W) an exceptional payment; to give in the form of a loan or a grant. In this respect, administrators, (most especially case-managers) claimed to be able to exercise a considerable amount of autonomy, and that they had, or could create, space to exercise their judgement. Indeed, in line with the 'implementation as organisational development' (Elmore 1997) (chapter 2), case-managers especially thought that they were being actively encouraged to use their initiative. Whilst formally, (*consulents* more than case-managers) were

obliged to work within a decision-making framework for deciding whether and in what form an exceptional need payment should be awarded, the majority of staff stated that they were able to pit their wits against the legislation and thus had a 'lot of freedom' (NL.01.08.M) to manoeuvre within it. They perceived that as long as they individualised the payment to their client's specific circumstances and problems, and often, as shall be seen, (ir-)responsible behaviour, they could give 'almost anything'

It's really up to you, how important you find it, and if you are smart enough, because huh? You stay human uh? So there are persons and you have read their file and you say 'oh no. No. I am really kind of gonna work hard to find a way to *not* give it', and then there are other (clients) where you say, 'I'm really going to find a way to give them everything they ask (for) (NL.01.12.W).

(the framework) is a kind of procedure: make an inquiry if they can get it or not; in a loan or a grant. But, also in the workbook it says uh, that you have to look at the individual circumstances, so you can make exceptions to the general rules, *but* you have to motivate it very well *why* you make that exception (NL.01.09.M).

Britain: 'Checking applications'

Unlike their Dutch counterparts, the Social Fund Officers'⁶ discretion in the British configuration of social assistance for categorising and deciding on 'deserving and undeserving' applicants was tightly constrained by the organisational mechanisms in place to structure and control their behaviour (Elmore 1997:246), as previous research has also found (Huby and Dix 1992). The British officers

⁶ Staff are formally termed as 'Social Fund Decision-Makers'. However, whilst voicing this term, they frequently referred to themselves by their previous title of 'Social Fund Officer'.

were obliged to administer a safety net for the most vulnerable whilst ‘watching the budget’ and meeting targets for clearing work.

Social Fund Officers’ primary concerns were to target a very specific and pre-defined social assistance population defined by Central Government Directions regarding the categories of applicant that payment could be awarded to, which the workers perceived as ‘very stringent to get into’ (B.01.DM2.W). Essentially, ‘applicants who faced a threat of care’; a ‘serious risk to their health and safety’, or who were experiencing ‘exceptional pressure’, should be ‘helped’, but not ‘changed’ with these discretionary payments. Staff concomitantly perceived that Community Care Grants, for instance, were for specific groups of poor people. Being poor, or on a low income per se, was not reason enough to warrant payment, because then, ‘everybody would get it’ (B.O2.DM2.W).

You know how the grants are sort of looked upon? They need to be coming out of care; a threat of going into care; a family under pressure; a prisoner on short-term release, or a planned resettlement program (B.03.DM1.W).

Unlike their Dutch activity fare counterparts therefore, Social Fund Officers in their ‘people processing’ section that ‘gave’ things to people rather than ‘did’ things to them, voiced no wider concern to move their customers out of social assistance. Rather, staff activities in the Social Fund section were more concerned with collecting information about customers and using that information in accordance with prescribed rules, to follow a ‘described course of action’ (Elmore 1978:194). ‘The directions’; ‘the regulations’ and ‘the guidance’,

contained in the Social Fund Guide, were, as previous research has found (Walker et al 1991), often referred to by staff⁷ in order to 'classify and dispose' of customers (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:240). The following participant's quote illustrates the emphasis that Social Fund administrators make when describing their jobs, both to the minutiae of decision making or their processing functions and their reliance on rules which tightly bound their discretion

I check applications from people who apply for grants, which are not repayable, for loans which obviously are repayable. Make such enquiries as is necessary. Use the directions and guidance I'm given [] and uh hopefully come to a balanced decision, using the law, the directions, area decision maker's guidance regarding budget status (B.01.DM4.M).

It is by these functions then, that the officer seeks to determine whether the discretionary application is, in the informal but pervasive discourse of the Social Fund, a 'pay or a nil/ knock-back'. In comparison with the Dutch administrators therefore, there was less emphasis on the 'problems' or behaviour of social assistance customers necessitating the intervention of their 'expert' or paternalistic judgement. Comparatively speaking British administrators may be better described as 'rational bureaucrats' concerned with the 'appropriate application of a body of rules and regulations', (Clarke and Newman 1997:6/7) in order to come to a decision.

⁷Many of the Social Fund staff had been with the DWP so long that they spoke of knowing the guide (previously called the Social Fund Manual), or as one of them termed it 'the weighty tome' 'off by heart'.

However, giving things to people without 'doing things' to them, along with the narrow focus on (some of the) eligible groups that Social Fund Officers were obliged to take, saw them share and articulate one of Anderson's (1991) main concerns regarding the separation of cash and care, or more specifically, cash and control over the behaviour of the (able-bodied) client. Theirs, Social Fund Officers perceived, was a last resort in which no responsibility or obligations for the receipt of aid were required from those most in need. Concomitantly, those social assistance beneficiaries not considered by 'the system' to be most in need of exceptional, discretionary payments⁸ were the 'normal people'. Ultimately, those who exhibited some form of responsibility, were about to start work, or looking for a job, were, officers perceived, 'punished', 'excluded' and 'not allowed help' by way of a discretionary payment from this 'hived off' exceptional need section. As the following participants quotes highlights, the 'irresponsible' or more 'undeserving' groups however, were given 'aid without behavioural requirements' (Mead 1997:3). As Sims et al (1993:24) argue then, and previous research has suggested (Huby and Dix 1992:93) tight organisational mechanisms of control which structure administrative action need not secure the normative acquiescence of the workers:

And I'll tell you what, the people who come in here, normal folk: nothing wrong with them, but they're just down on their luck, no money, can't really afford the loan, because they're trying to say 'oh, I can't afford this, and I need to budget'. They get nothing because they're ordinary. Whereas the junkies or the discharged prisoners, and your discharged prisoners: 99% of them go back into prison, so why, why should they get

⁸ Rather than a Budgeting Loan.

resettled, 'cos I always say to myself: 'they're just having a wee holiday here, before they go back care of Her Majesty'. But I can see what the general public. It's the groups that have brought most of the problems upon themselves, get the aid. But am I being? Although if you do get the case where a lone parent or a recovering drug addict, and they are genuine, you want to help them (B.01.DM1.W).

So virtually everybody that is turned down for money says that: 'if I was on drink', eh, 'if I was an alcoholic or a drug addict' (I would get some money). I mean that's, so maybe it's just the general perception of 'if you're not trying to do anything to keep yourself and em, get out of the bit, well, we throw money after you' (laughs) (B.02.DM2.W).

Some of them get on their high horse: 'I'm entitled, I'm entitled', and you feel like saying 'it's my income tax that's paying this', you know. You think, 'you're a layabout, you've not worked, and you're never going to work' (B.02.DM1.W).

As well as this concern with differentiating between pre-defined groups (as defined by Central Government Directions) of 'deserving' applicants for Community Care Grants, Social Fund Officers' discretion is further constrained by 'the guidance' provided to assist them in making their decisions. They frequently voiced a concern to differentiate between what they termed as the normal, or on-going needs, and the exceptional needs of the pre-defined categories of low-income groups. For example, replacement items or on-going needs (i.e. a need/item not related to the applicant's ability to remain in the community), should, according to the majority of administrators, have been met by way of a Budgeting Loan. Budgeting loans were perceived by staff to be determined more

on 'objective' eligibility criteria⁹: the length of time on benefit, and the family composition of the applicant. What staff glean from 'the guidance', and therefore look for in a CCG application is a 'new need', which must relate to the applicant's ability to remain in the community.

Replacement of items is an ongoing need. I mean you or I have to replace items. So therefore even if you have somebody who's disabled, you know that they are going to have to replace the items, so you should be budgeting from your income and from your care component. [] But if it's a one off [] and it's just suddenly happened. Say (a child) had been in foster care, and they'd come home, and they had ADHD¹⁰, and they were hyperactive, and a bed wetter, and they didn't have a washing machine. Although there's DLA¹¹ paid, we would give them a washing machine, because there's something new in the household, which is (the child) coming out of foster care. That kind of thing. [] that's not an ongoing, that's a new (need), so we would pay for a community care grant in that scenario (B.O2.DM1.W).

Social Fund Officers' discretion is further informed, and more so than in the Netherlands constrained, by their concern to 'pay attention to the Area Decision-Makers guidance regarding budget status' (B.01.DM4.M). Essentially, while the Dutch administrators had little direct conception of being budget limited, assessment of need in Britain does not take place prior to, or separate from the resourcing of intervention to meet it (Clarke and Newman 1997:76). This focus on budgets and targets is an integral part of the administrator's job in a managerial welfare context: limits on Social Fund Officers are thus 'set by cost

⁹ Not always fairly, because they couldn't stop customers 'buying drink and drugs with the money'. However, this perception must be understood in the context of a limited CCG fund – from which they can not meet people's essential needs.

¹⁰ Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

¹¹ Disability living allowance.

controls and performance targets' (Clarke and Newman 1997:64). To a large extent, therefore, the Dutch concern of trying to meet exceptional need whilst activating clients is substituted in the Social Fund Officer's frame of reference by their managerial obligation to 'look after the budget' (B.01.DM6.W), which they perceive, can not stretch to meeting the needs of those most in need.

We're talking *hard hard* times now. [] we could (give the daily allocation of money for community care grants away) in ten minutes and then we could all go down to the park and play on the swings. You can *see* need, but you no longer. [] That's the problem with the job: sticking to the money, you have to stick to the money, because it just stores up problems for yourself. It's *grossly* unfair, um, if someone's need happens to occur in February and March, and we haven't policed the system. Because we can't say to the client: your need is April to June, you know? (B.O1.DM5.M).

'cos we have a budget, we're not allowed to overspend on the budget, so, you know? It's swings and roundabouts at times; it's like walking a tightrope. There's never enough money to meet what people need (B.O1.DM3.M).

Because there was never enough money to meet peoples' needs, officers perceived that they simply could not manage the budget and meet all of the need presented to them. Subsequently, because they had 'literally got to bring the budget in on penny' (B.01.DM6.W) at the end of the financial year, staff were concerned with managing the budget and meeting some of the need. They did this by spreading a little money over a large number of customers: giving applicants the 'minimum (they could) get away with' (B.O1.DM6.W). In effect this

meant that only what officers referred to as the 'highest of the high priority items' in keeping people out of institutional care would be considered for payment.

This budget that we've got to operate for community care grants is out of order. It's *completely*, and totally ridiculous. I mean people are falling into a category where they should be getting paid.

And you can't?

They're getting very little. You just give them the minimum that you can get away with. [] but that to me is a scandal [] There's people missing out that should be getting help you know [] CCG's for example. If you are talking about a customer who is setting up house and is qualifying under (direction) 4a2 or 4a3. So you know they qualify for it, and they've got like three thousand pounds worth of household items that they need, because they're setting up house with *nothing*. We then have to *pick out* the items which have the highest priority. Well, the government high priority (B.O1.DM6.W).

It's a nightmare sometimes. It's very difficult, knowing that these are people's lives and that's. *All* the items they're applying for are important, but you've got to try and prioritise them. It is very difficult (B.03.DM1.W).

Staff thus constantly referred to primarily meeting only the most basic needs of ('able-bodied') applicants: entirely fitting perhaps with 'liberal' welfare conceptions of human needs for subsistence (Ignatieff 1990). As one Social Fund Officer explained:

We work on the premise of the most essential items, for *anybody* is cooker, beds, bedding, pots, pans, crockery and cutlery. Now if they had no um, health problems, young and fit, um, those would be the items that would be the most essential. [] every other item, if they're fit and healthy as I've said, and they're in walking distance of supermarkets, or there's shops around - they can shop

daily. So that, no fridge. Washing machines things like that, if there's a laundrette, or they're perfectly fit and can wash by hand and there's a drying area, then. As long as each item after that we can say, 'well, no, you're fit and healthy, no, (B.01.DM2.W)

The latter needs had mostly been informally agreed on by staff in the offices of research, as the most essential of all human needs. Consequently, as previous research into the Social Fund has highlighted (Huby and Dix 1992) staff perceived that they actually had very little discretion in deciding on items that could be awarded for payment, and often resented this.

It's getting to be almost formulised, that we don't have any discretion, because (pauses)

You can't?

You can't. [] and as I've always says as well, you can go the wrong way. It's not discretionary: it's (hits desk with each word spoken) 'you will only pay that'. That was never the intention [] you have to make your own individual decisions. That you, we can stand up to that and say 'I'm sorry, I can argue that and that's what I think'. Em, it's extremely difficult with the money. The budget. (B.01.DM5.M).

In effect, their managerial concerns with budgets and (as detailed later in the chapter) targets for clearing work, translated to, as they termed it, 'knocking back or nilling' as many discretionary applications as possible, and deterring customer demand for the immediate Crisis Loans for living expenses (which had to be processed on the same day). 'Knocking back' as many 'losts, spents or stolens'¹² as possible, was thought to lower workloads by signalling to potential

¹² Terms used by Social Fund staff for applicants who have spent their benefit money/ reported their benefit money/book lost or stolen.

applicants that there was little point in applying, 'in droves' or 'by the bus load' (B.01.DM2.W).

The Crisis Loans, um, that puts pressure on us, because we've got to clear them in one day. So that then impacts on other business, who are then waiting longer, because of these damn targets. Because there was an expectation that a lot of these (Crisis Loans) were paid. And that attracted more people coming in [] a lot of our (IRS reviews) are crisis loans and *we don't want to pay them*. But they're getting overturned (at IRS) [] I mean we'd be awash with claims if we just rolled over and paid these (B.01.DM5.M).

Each organisational context therefore elicits particular constraints to 'helping people' for the two sets of workers. The 'paternalistic administrator', in trying to change the behaviour or attitudes of their (able-bodied) clients, is able to use *Bijzondere Bijstand* as a lever of compliance in order to overcome the 'role strain or confusion' (Young 1981:36) inherent in meeting need whilst activating (able-bodied) beneficiaries. Essentially staff attempt to encourage clients to 'work with them'. British Social Fund Officers' constraints on helping customers arise from their organisational 'managerial' context, in which they can not meet all of the need presented to them whilst managing the budget. They are thus concerned with excluding as many applicants as possible, rather than persuading, cajoling, or disciplining beneficiaries into 'working with' them.

Separating the 'deserving from the undeserving' poor: administrative means and methods

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the data generated in both countries with administrators was their concern to prevent 'fraudulent' or (what they considered to be) inappropriate claiming by ascertaining certainty over an applicant's exceptional need. The means that the 'paternalist' and 'managerial' worker has at his or her disposal generated by the nature of the staff-client relationship in their organisations however, significantly affects the degree to which they can achieve this goal, and establish what they perceive to be important for the awarding of a payment. The Dutch administrators are concerned both to determine the honesty and living standards of those 'apparently impotent' claimants, as well as the level of motivation and work seeking behaviour/attitude of the able bodied. British Social Fund Officers on the other hand, perceiving that they are 'not allowed to help' 'responsible people' or those seeking work with a discretionary payment, are more concerned with the 'genuineness' of applicants.

Comparatively speaking, gaining certainty over a client's exceptional need request was far easier for the Dutch administrator. Concerned with developing staff-client relationships conducive to 'people-changing' administrators needed to ascertain a relatively high level of knowledge about clients and their problems. The paternalistic assumption was that clients needed direction if they were to live constructively, overcome their problems and attain self-sufficiency.

Administrators perceived that especially beneficiaries ‘who have a *lot* of problems’, left to their own devices, would ‘do nothing’ (NL.01.05.W).

Getting people on a job it’s, that’s not a challenge. It is a challenge to resolve the problems around the person.

So for instance, what kind of problems might they be?

Um, getting a home, a decent home. Um, debts. Many debts (laughs) um, try to learn (the clients) how to get along with money, and how to spend the money. Um, addict, um, yeah, when a woman lives alone with children: try to get a balance in working and uh looking after the children (NL.01.15.W).

When asked to consider hypothetical applicants (see vignettes in Appendix 3) for payment case-managers and *consulents* frequently voiced that they would already ‘know their client’s’ particular circumstances and ‘problems’. The face-to-face client-administrator meetings and conversations held previously (or for the specific purpose of the application – see below), would subsequently allow staff to individualise the payment to the applicant. In the case of the able-bodied beneficiary seeking an exceptional payment, they would also know how ‘motivated’ he/she was and, as the following participant’s quote highlights, would already have a degree of certainty over ‘whether or not to give’

(discussing scenario 1) Well, the first decision I make is, how serious is he? When I know him, when it’s my client and I know he’s very serious and he’s very motivated and I know he doesn’t have (clothes suitable for an interview) because he always comes in very old clothes, well then I know whether to give him (NL.01.03.W).

The latter responses, whilst frequent, were not exclusive. As outlined previously in the chapter, regular face to face interviews, or an in-depth knowledge of the client's case history and problems were often hampered for the *consulents* (rather than case-managers) because of their relatively high, and in some instances, frequently changing case loads. However, when they 'did not know the client' requesting an exceptional payment, they would want to. Face-to-face interviews, amongst other things, allowed administrators to check the motivation, or the reciprocal attitude: the willingness to actively look for a job (van Oorschot 2000:36) and therefore in this configuration of social assistance, the 'deservingness' of the able bodied unemployed.

(discussing scenario 1) I would like to know him better, before I would say well, we'll give you some money. If he's serious about looking for work and things like that (NL.01.09.M).

The principle of individualisation in decision-making necessitates an in-depth personal assessment of the client and their circumstances. The rules of what normal benefit rates 'should' cover mean that they can not award this type of payment to someone whose personal circumstances they do not know in-depth.

If I know him (and his background) I can make it (the case to award payment) stronger, but if I don't know him then it's going to be difficult. So on the first instance it's no because he um, should be saving. Shoes and a suit is normal clothing (NL.01.04.W).

It depends on how he looks. Is he looking very bad and (does) he smell? (NL.01.05.W).

In a system where such payments are used by the administrator as a lever of compliance moreover, face-to-face interviews allowed the administrator to stipulate the terms on which a payment would be given, or to 'bargain for welfare' (Mead 1997:5) with the able-bodied applicant.

(Discussing what might happen to the male applicant in scenario 3 under the case-the management system) for him I would make a work *police*, a contract where we make a plan that he can get everything he wants from me then at that time (in effect the carpet, cot and pram). Everything, but at the same time he gets a (telling that) 'this is what we agree, this is what you are going to do – in six months you have to find (a job) and out! And you are not coming back to this office within two years (NL.01.12.W).

For those applicants judged as 'impotently' poor, and thus morally excused from work the honesty, or sincerity of the client became more of an issue for the 'activity fare' administrator, echoing Knegt's (1987:122) research. Certainty over need (for relatively large and expensive items of household furniture) in such instances is primarily gained through house visits, which served a variety of purposes in the Netherlands.

In contrast to what we might expect from what has been described as a social democratic income maintenance system (Goodin et al 1999), but more fully in line with paternalistic welfare provision, the living conditions of 'impotent' applicants requesting furniture needed to be, by administrative standards, visibly poor (discussed further in chapter 7). Administrators thus wanted to 'know what was happening' at the clients' house (NL.01.15.W), this allowed both a moral

evaluation of a client's consumption standards and could also detect fraudulent behaviour.

We (will) go and see the beds and the cooker because only one has serious problems (in relation to bed wetting), and they are asking for three beds. Well, then we wonder: 'well why three when only one has (incontinence) problems' (NL.01.03.W).

Well, first I would ask her why she needs three (new beds), and I would go to her house and look at yeah, what's really going on (NL.01.09.M).

Relatively speaking, when considering an applicant's exceptional need, the Dutch administrators, in their paternalistic 'people changing' role, were concerned with and able to, consider the client's particular underlying reasons for being reliant on social assistance. They were further able to pick and choose carefully as to who would be helped, how much and under what conditions. Thus, their decision involved not only a determination of the reasons for poverty, but also a prediction as to the likely effects that a special payment would have in relieving it.

Conversely, for the Social Fund Officers situated in their 'people processing' 'anti-paternalist' (Clarke and Newman 1997:50) welfare context, the relative nature and duration of client-staff encounters differed significantly. In a comparative perspective, the degree to which the Social Fund Officer can ascertain certainty over an applicant's need is very much constrained.

Essentially, staff-client encounters in the Social Fund were seldom face-to-face, mediated instead by an application form. The customers' problem and whether or not it sufficed to place them in one of the pre-determined categories of deserving applicants had mostly to be gleaned, in the first instance, from their written word. As officers dealt exclusively with the exceptional needs of social assistance beneficiaries, customers' circumstances often had to be wholly determined from, and verified by, a variety of sources. The DWP computer system allowed the officers to ascertain the type, nature and duration of a claimant's benefit history. Outside organisations, for instance social work agencies, the housing department or a woman's refuge, which might be more involved with the applicant, could be contacted by the officer to confirm their story¹³, as long as the applicant had both detailed them, and, because of the Data Protection Act, given their express permission, 'ticked the box on the form' (B.01.DM6.W).

Such documentary procedures were rarely perceived by administrators as the best means of ascertaining whether or not somebody fitted the directions for a discretionary award. In part, this was due to the nature of the forms, which several staff felt customers needed the skills of 'a Philadelphia lawyer to understand' (B.01.DM1.W). Often therefore, staff perceived that there existed a mis-match between the documentary methods of application to the Social Fund, and the literacy competence of clients

¹³ This term was repeatedly used by Social Fund Officers to denote the applicant's account of their circumstances (rather than a fictional tale), which officer's perceived may or may not have been true.

We take the information simply that's put on the claim form [] we're relying on somebody's ability to fill in a form. Not many clients are actually... very good at that. So the applications that come in are usually quite scanty (B.01.DM5.M).

Confirming previous research (Huby and Dix 1992), staff further felt that with 'processing pieces of paper' (B.01.DM5.M), the resultant lack of any kind of personal interaction with customers was simply not conducive to making what they termed as 'quality' decisions. Often for instance, it was perceived that clients, in trying to articulate their needs on paper, failed to provide an inkling that they might be classed as one of the groups eligible for a discretionary award

You can gauge a lot from a person: talking to them, rather than what they write down on a piece of paper [] the ones that are more difficult is where it could be a family under exceptional pressure; it could be domestic violence, and it hasn't really come out very well on the form. And then when you start to talk to them they say 'well, this happened'. And it doesn't say anything on the form about, woman's aid or that. It's only when you talk to them, they say 'well, I've been in a woman's aid hostel' or 'the police were involved', and then you can find out, you can check up the information' (B.02.DM1.W).

The difficulties of ascertaining need from a piece of paper and/or multi-agencies were further compounded for officers by their managerial targets for clearing work. Comparatively, the speed at which officers made their decisions on the hypothetical applications presented to them was striking. The theoretical literature in part, supports this finding. Social Fund staff-client encounters after all are 'not concerned to change the behavior' of customers (Hasenfeld 1972:257). Staff perceived however that each encounter with the client's written word had to

be carried out in as fast a time as possible due to the amount of applications received and targets for processing applications.

I'm involved with Crisis Loan (decision-making) at the moment. So it's as customers turn up, they're dealt with just as they turn up. Yeah. And the other loans or grants are dealt with in date order. We can't do anything else other than that method, 'cos if you try to prioritise, you get nowhere! Somebody needs a cooker: is that more important than a washing machine or whatever, so we just *date* order and we just *plough* through them. That's all we do.

Researcher: right, so when you say it's date order that's like?

The date received in the office, you get a date stamp on it.

Researcher: and then it's so many days from then, that that claim has to be

Well, there is a, or should be dealt with, within a certain period of time, eh, otherwise we get black points for it. It's got to be cleared within a certain amount of days, it's not always possible, for, for reasons various: staff on sick leave or whatever, eh, but we try our best (B.O1.DM3.M).

The grants hit the tray, they're uh, they're recorded by the clerical assistants, uh, put in date order into the tray and (participant sighs heavily) a couple of us, if there are a couple of us there, just muck in and take the oldest ones first and just, go through them (B.O1.DM4.M).

Often therefore, forms that lacked (sufficient) information in effect meant that the application, if not unambiguously satisfying any of the directions, was rejected because of the time it would take to look for further information, and the budgetary controls outlined earlier. The onus was then on the applicant to ask for a review, where staff carried out a face to face interview, looked for, and often

found adequate information, of a sensitive, personal and distressing nature, which staff perceived, customers were often reticent to disclose on paper.

People come in and they're maybe incontinent or they've got something that they really don't want anybody to know about, and they don't put it down on their claim form. I'm there and I'm saying 'have you any health problems?' 'No, no I'm fine'. And then I'm trying to say 'well if you're fine then you don't fit into these categories [] so if you have got anything'. And then all of a sudden prfft, they've got all this. And I say 'well, why didn't you put it on'? And they say 'oh, I didn't want anyone to know, it's personal' [] um, I mean I've had some horrendous stories here [] and naturally, they're saying 'well, would you want to put that on a form' (B.01.DM2.W).

Essentially, the lack of face to face interviews for discretionary payments, meant that administrators lacked the ability to gain a great deal of certainty over the applicant's need: it was very difficult to decide the 'genuineness' of the applicant from a form.

And you get a far better feel, as to whether somebody's em, telling you porkies or not, if you actually speak to them. There's no doubt about it. Because anybody can say anything on a form. And it works the other way, because sometimes you think 'pull the other one', and then you speak to the person, you know: 'I think that's a very genuine person', you know. And yet you wouldn't have got that impression from the written word at all (B.02.DM2.W).

Paradoxically however, where the applicant had tried to signal to the officer that they belonged to one of the deserving groups/category of applicant with a high priority need, administrators became suspicious, as previous research has also found, that the applicant knew how to, what staff interchangeably termed 'play, screw or abuse the system' to get themselves a discretionary award (see also

Howe 1985). By definition therefore, the genuine or deserving people did not know what to put down on the form, and so again missed out. Those that were 'at it' (B.03.DM2.W) however

Know the wording of the code, inside out: 'this would be a serious risk to my health and safety if I did not get'. They know, they know. They know to say, in certain cases, that 'the bed was ruined because of incontinence', and the spelling of that can be a joy! [] So they have a child without a bed. Whereas, the genuine case would say 'the child is incontinent because of whatever, and I've tried cleaning it, and the bed is a bit smelly', em, 'I would like a new bed because of that': that's normal replacement, and the child's still got a bed, so they can clean it. So that's the genuine case, and the other one is 'the child doesn't have a bed. The bed's out in the skip' (B.03.DM2.W).

In the case of Community Care Grants especially, officers perceived, (just like their Dutch counterparts) that house visits, which were rarely funded by their superiors, or indeed thought to be welcomed by either claimants or those who lobbied on their behalf¹⁴, would have been most beneficial. Whilst this finding echoes previous research into the Social Fund (Walker et al 1991), the present study suggests that what officers were equally concerned with was 'getting the word out on the street' that any given CCG claimant might be visited on spec, rather than by appointment. This, it was felt, would deter those applicants staff perceived were looking for a 'top up of benefit' and out to 'screw or abuse the system', (an enduring theme in this area of provision in Britain as chapter 3 highlighted) because they would not know the exact date/time at which they

should engage in such behaviour as hiding their 'stuff up in the loft' (B.01.DM5.M)

If you thought 'this doesn't sound', I'm going to go out and check'. Yeah, we'd done that and it had been quite successful, because they'd got the items. Especially if you didn't tell them you were coming out. But we can't fund it anymore. So you've really got to go on what they're writing down (B.02.DM1.W).

Ultimately therefore, the documentary procedures that Social Fund Officers had primarily to rely on, and the resultant lack of house visits or face-to-face contact with customers, meant that staff were never really sure whether or not they were doing something socially worthwhile.

And paying out the correct need, that's the bit that gets me, because then I would feel that when I was sitting down with some of these pieces of paper, that this person I was thinking about, *did* need that. Or didn't as the case may be, and I could make a correct decision. I'm doing the best I can but I don't know whether it's right or wrong (B.03.DM2.W).

Working within these constraints, and in an attempt to ration very scarce resources, Social Fund Officers 'invented a version of mass processing' that would allow them to 'deal with their public fairly' (Lipsky 1981:24). Whilst they felt unable to ascertain a great deal of certainty over an applicant's need, what they could gain certainty about, from the computer system and the customer's application form¹⁵, was the previous number of applications the customer had

¹⁴ For instance CAB, Welfare Rights, and the Independent Review Service for the Social Fund were often perceived by staff to militate against house visits.

¹⁵ The Clerical Officer details the amount of previous applications on the applicants' form, before it is put before the Social Fund Decision-Makers.

made to the Social Fund. The administrative meaning of the Social Fund as a 'one off payment scheme', then becomes very precise, applicants fitting the directions should be awarded payment only very rarely. 'If they haven't had one before' was a major criterion of deservingness, or factor in the decision-makers frame of reference for awarding a Discretionary Community Care grant or Crisis Loan.

(Discussing interviewing customers for Crisis Loans in order to determine their 'deservingness') I mean it's difficult to say. Because when they come in they're usually all in the same, the same boat and it's obvious that they are em, on a low income. However, em, (pauses) we don't. If they, if they've spent the money and they've got proof and they can verify what they've actually spent the money on, and they're genuine, and it was a one off situation and they know that it'll not happen again, then, then, usually we'll pass that on [] we usually look at their history, if they've had previous: if not then that's a big (B.01.CO.W).

(Discussing scenario 2) I'd then go into the system, we have the facility on the system that for um, individual items, we can go up to 200 weeks back and see previous applications. So what I'd do is, I'd pull that up and I'd start saying 'right, what have we had?' if um, they'd had say a cooker [] repeat claims should em, normally be dealt with as a budgeting loan [] when we've got so many new claims that we're actually looking at (B.O1.DM5.M).

The 'regulars', as staff termed applicants who had previously applied for or been awarded (any form of) payments from the Social Fund, were perceived to repeatedly, impudently and sometimes angrily demand their rights, and consume two of the administrators most scarce resources, time and money. Moreover, officers perceived that, because the resources were hoarded by the 'regulars', out to 'screw or abuse the system', the (administratively, rather than officially defined)

deserving people, either those ineligible for help, or, even more deserving, those that did not ask for it in the first place, were missing out.

What we have is. We have a very small, 5 to 10 to 15% probably of our popular client group, are the regulars. There's others who might have been on benefit for years; we never hear from, right? And you've got the certain crew, that are never away from the place. These are the real, that give us the troublesome. Because they're the ones that give us repeat work. Time after time after time, they take us away from helping the people that don't come [] because em, many of the people had *no* previous knowledge of social security, there was no one *telling* them. You don't need to tell this 10 to 15%: they could work here!

Researcher: Who are the, you know those core people? Who are they?

We have a lot of problems with like junkies and that with Crisis Loans. The others are lone parents, um incapacities of various disorders, um, others that have managed for some reason to be on benefit for *years* (B.01.DM5.M).

Within these organisational limits to their discretion, and perhaps Social Fund Officer's training/educational backgrounds (discussed previously in chapter 5), there was little administrative recourse to the dynamics of poverty or the associated barriers to the labour market which might be faced by the groups of 'regular' or long-term social assistance beneficiaries.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the nature of the two exceptional need schemes under study. The respective configurations of social assistance clearly influenced both the workers' perceptions of what they, as the 'last resort', were there to provide, and thus do with, for or to applicants: to change or process

them. However, in a comparative context, the 'moral code' (Knegt 1987) of those who administer exceptional payments from within these two welfare states is strikingly similar. Essentially, those compelled to distinguish between the 'deserving and the undeserving poor' (Handler and Hollingsworth 1971) differentiate between the impotent and/or responsible 'deserving poor' on the one hand, and the able-bodied, irresponsible 'undeserving poor' on the other. However, the administrative horizons of possibilities, or lack thereof, for deciding on or choosing the 'deserving poor' are structured and constrained by their organisational contexts.

The British 'managerial people-processing' context on the one hand, and the Dutch 'paternalistic people-changing' context on the other, can be seen to inform and structure what the two sets of workers are concerned to do. In the Netherlands, exceptional needs are met by administrators in the context of activating or motivating social assistance beneficiaries (either socially or to the labour market), whilst the British officers meet the needs of those most in need whilst managing a budget and meeting targets for clearing work. The staff client relationships which these contexts generate see the Dutch administrators reticent to award payment to those clients they do not know relatively well, while in Britain, officers are reluctant to award payment to those they know to be 'regular' Social Fund applicants.

In the Netherlands, administrators use *Bijzondere Bijstand* as a (complex) tool of administration, as a 'lever of compliance' to chastise, motivate and/or alter the

behaviour of a diverse clientele with 'fears, problems or escape routes' (NL.01.04.W). Concerned with the socialisation or re-socialisation of clients, discretionary decisions regarding an exceptional payment are firmly situated in an assessment of the client's behaviour, their perceived ability and willingness to change. The decision explicitly therefore entails a reciprocal element. What has the client done, or will the client do, in return for the payment requested.

Social Fund Officers conversely, separated from the administration of 'welfare to work' in Britain administer a safety net for the most vulnerable, and perceive that they are 'not allowed' to help claimants whom they often consider to be 'deserving' of a discretionary payment. Here, the directions, regulations and guidance, as well as targets and budgetary constraints inform, structure, and constrain decision making, rather than concerns to 'activate clients'.

In comparison with the Netherlands, the British officers perceived that both time and financial resources were inadequate compared to the tasks they were asked to perform. A large number of 'customers' press their demands on one side, while on the other the Social Fund Officer is subjected to 'intensified forms of centralised power and control, through tighter fiscal control, policy directions and an apparatus of audit and evaluation' (Clarke and Newman 1997:29). This organisational context is perceived as a 'no-win situation', which subsequently informs administrative actions of 'knocking back', and/or deterring, as many discretionary applications as possible.

This chapter then, illustrated that Dutch administrators use exceptional payments as an 'implementation method', to achieve the result of getting applicants out of social assistance. Conversely, Social Fund Officers are obliged to concentrate on results associated with efficiency and evaluation. Relatively speaking the methods of implementation to achieve these become less important (Clarke and Newman 1997:64).

Organisational environments and configurations of social assistance have been shown to condition the ways the two sets of welfare state workers perceive a problem and frame solutions to it. Ultimately, the environments and associated methods for separating the 'deserving from the undeserving poor' inform, shape and constrain the actual practise of administrative discretion (Hawkins 1992:3) and thus can not logically be separated from the discretionary decision itself (Emerson and Paley 1992:231).

From a comparative perspective moreover the degree to which the two sets of workers can exercise discretion is, as the following chapter illustrates, the degree to which they can effectively exercise social control.

Chapter 7 The administration of loans and grants: controlling budgets and behaviour

'Social security and the control of the poor are inseparable issues', argues Dean (1991:59). Drawing on Townsend (1979:823/824) he argues that the function, and particularly the administration, of social security benefits has as much to do with controlling behaviour as it does with meeting need. By illuminating the meanings associated with the administration of forms of exceptional payments, loans and grants, this chapter argues that administrative control is contingent on particular social assistance configurations.

Whilst controlling the behaviour of clients is not an absent concern for the British administrators, discretionary decision making on loans and grants is informed and constrained by managerial concerns of controlling a budget and rationing 'the demand for services' (Higgins 1980:19). In the Netherlands conversely, loans and grants in an 'activity fare' context were used as a system of 'individualised rewards and punishments' (Dean 1991:31). Such forms of exceptional payments therefore constituted 'the explicit (and paternalistic- 'carrot and stick') means used by the 'people-changing' staff to 'influence clients to comply' (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996:238) with their reciprocal obligations for the receipt of social assistance.

'The right money to the right people'

A comparable and salient theme arising from the present research was the significance administrators in both countries attached to the different forms of

payment at their disposal: grants and loans. Notwithstanding the different degrees of discretion (outlined in the previous chapter) that the two sets of administrators employed, in all instances staff were concerned that, where possible, the 'right people'¹ received the right form of payment to meet their exceptional need.

In both countries, grants were perceived as a unilateral money exchange, in that administrators frequently voiced that clients and customers would not have to pay the money back. Within their particular organisational context they did consider certain forms of customer and client behaviour as an 'equal good from their subjective perspective' however (Goodin 2002:588; see also Gouldner 1960:172). Exceptional payments in the form of loans on the other hand essentially have reciprocity built in to them, because, in the words of both sets of administrators, clients and customers will be 'paying it back'.

These perceptions and meanings attached to grants and loans are moreover inextricably bound in the administrative frame of reference with the nature of the needy: notions of responsible/irresponsible (Knegt 1987) and hence deserving and undeserving applicants. To a greater or lesser extent, depending on the social assistance configuration, administrative concerns and decision making on deservingness centred on whether applicants for an exceptional payment were thought to be 'genuinely ill, genuinely seeking work, (or) genuinely supporting

¹ Social Fund Officers frequently reported that their 'mantra' was 'the right money to the right people at the right time'.

children on their own' (Townsend 1979:823). As Townsend (1979:823) argues, to give an exceptional payment (especially by way of a grant) without assurance of the latter factors would come into conflict with other values upon which many societies are built, and it might be argued with which both sets of administrators comply: that incomes are earned from work, and that men living with women should support them.

'They don't have to pay it back': awarding payment as a grant

Administrative justifications for 'who gets a grant and why' are firmly situated in the paternalistic and managerial organisational contexts and constraints in which they work. Essentially, Dutch activity fare administrators were keen and, unlike their British counterparts, able to reward the behaviour of those clients who made their job easier: 'motivated' beneficiaries who were thought to want to get out of social assistance. The latter clients were seen to be reciprocating by, as Van Oorschot (2000:36) argues, actively looking for a job or showing willingness to participate in a re-insertion programme. Subsequently, the perception that clients were trying to do something back for the administrator, often overrode issues associated with the 'control' (Cook 1979; Golding and Middleton 1982; Van Oorschot 2000; De Swaan 1998) that the able-bodied beneficiary could have exercised over the need presented to both *consulents* and case-managers, and saw them considered for a grant, rather than a loan from *Bijzondere Bijstand*.

'I think it will be a gift': the Netherlands

Such concerns are clearly explicated in the administrative responses to vignette scenario 1 (see Appendix 3). For the *consulents*, who as outlined in chapter 3, had to work closer to the municipal guidelines than the case-managers, this scenario represented what many of them termed 'a difficult decision' because of the explicit acknowledgement that items of clothing and footwear are included in the general social assistance scale rates in the Netherlands (Ministry for Social Affairs 1990:95). Thus, such applicants could be considered responsible for their plight in that normal benefit rates allow for saving for the items now requested by way of an exceptional payment.

It's very difficult. He's not working and he has a normal income of 500 guilders and this payment is meant for rent, food and clothes. (Points to vignette) he's asking for shoes and a suit. He has to save (for those items) from his normal income (NL.01.01.M).

However, while these costs should be met by normal benefit, the vignette scenario suggests, and the majority of *consulents* subsequently considered, that the applicant was very close to the labour market, was fulfilling his obligations for the receipt of social assistance, and that such a payment might get him 'out of social assistance', to work and self-sufficiency. Being able to assure themselves that the client was indeed looking for work (by the means and methods for separating the deserving from the undeserving poor outlined in the previous chapter), *consulents* were disposed to actively search for information that would individualise the payment to the client's specific and 'special' circumstances.

The most common reason offered, or constructed by the *consulent* for the applicant not to have been able to save from his normal income for the items requested, was that he had previously had some kind of a problem. For instance, a former addiction would have meant that budgeting from his monthly benefit to buy clothes would not have been one of the applicant's major concerns.

He gets money every month [and] there is a part of it to save up for clothes and for shoes, that sorts of things. [So in] just a standard case – normal people - we will not give it. The case that I know that it does happen was someone who had been in em, well, how do you say that. He was in the past a heavy drinker, an alcoholic. Now he was clean and this was his first chance to get a job. But, he had never bought new clothes for years because he was heavily drinking, and then we said 'if he goes there (to the interview) in these clothes, he will surely, not get the job'. So we said 'we have to give that man a chance'. So then it happened. (NL.01.06.M).

The importance of reciprocity as a good of equal worth for the activity fare administrator is further highlighted by the following participant's quote. Essentially, the following client need not have been considered for a payment from *Bijzondere Bijstand* at all, because the municipal guidelines suggest that, as chapter 3 outlined, social assistance beneficiaries with no debts be referred on to a social lending bank. However, the administrator is keen to reward what she perhaps considers to be the client's good behaviour with a grant.

If they have no debts, they don't belong here, they must go to a bank for people with a low income. So, um, if they have no debts they must go there, always. Uh, but now I'm busy with a man who pa(id) his debt for three years (to the social lending bank). (He) must now move (house) and asks for (flooring) and (redecorating) costs, and in that situation I

don't think it's fair, because he's (already paid) for three years to come out of his debt, and then uh

Researcher: He would have to get another debt?

Yes. So I think, and I write down (on the report) that he must get *Bijzondere Bijstand* as a gift (as a grant). And I must motivate why I think that: because he lived three years (already) on a low level, he pays his debts, he is starting again, uh making something of his life. He's young and he's had many problems but now I think he must have help by us. So we have that option, but you must always motivate.

Researcher: so, because he's starting to get his life together?

Yes, he is in a *traject*, and that goes very well. I have the report of it, and I don't think it's fair that we give him a loan again. So that's why I motivate to give him *Bijzondere Bijstand* (NL.01.07.W).

Case-managers however, not being concerned to work as closely to the municipal guidelines as *consulents*, were not troubled with what 'should be'. Instead, they were concerned with what 'could be': which in this instance was getting a motivated social assistance beneficiary into the labour market. Rather than being concerned with issues of control or with constructing clients' circumstances as in some way special, case-managers explicitly considered and voiced issues of reciprocity in their decision-making.

First I will see how hard he worked about uh education, experience in work eh? Maybe volunteers work, or whatever he was doing. When he really can show me (that) he was really active and, and yeah, and really already, really working on it.. (NL.01.12.W).

As the latter quote highlights, a unilateral payment of a grant can be given by the paternalistic administrator as a reward for reciprocal behaviour rendered by a

client in the past, which many further considered would serve only to increase the client's motivation to look for work, by reinforcing the client's good behaviour.

if we have him on a *traject*, and it's about to end, and the ending is to go to work, well, then almost every time we would do this for him to show that we do something extra to help him. It motivates quite a lot for people, and (shows him that) he has been taken serious if we do this and then he will be very serious about the *solicitation* (search for work). This is an example of how to motivate people, yeah (NL.01.02.M).

Unlike their British counterparts therefore, the Dutch administrators stated that a grant could and would be given to those who were deemed to be motivated and 'really looking for work'. Perhaps more surprisingly, the case-managers (but not the *consulents*) would also be able, and inclined, to award those they perceived as 'not motivated to work' a grant for exceptional items requested, in order to try and elicit feelings of obligation from those they perceived as undeserving able-bodied beneficiaries in the future. As outlined in chapter 3, under the new case-management system in the main municipality of research, the social assistance beneficiary would be required to sign a written and binding contract detailing the mutual contractual obligations of both parties: cash assistance (and in the context of the present research any exceptional needs) and employment preparation in return for conscientious participation. As Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:221) state, in the context of welfare to work, contracts are 'supposed to change values', and thus the attitudes, motivations and behaviour of the poor.

Those piloting the new system in part talked of removing barriers to the labour market, as the clients themselves perceived them.

We are going to give everybody a contract. And what we want to try to do is ask: what do you need, what do you think you need to get back to work? (NL.01.03.W)

Nonetheless, essentially such a flexible system of carrots or economic incentives (giving clients 'what they think they need' to get them to the labour market) came with ever-tighter strings for the social assistance beneficiary, in an attempt to, as Higgins (1980:5/6) argues, achieve a greater level of social control by changing the behaviour of the poor.

I can imagine that you (will) say 'well we are giving you this, this and this. But in the contract it also (states that) within a year you have to work. So it's not giving without.

Researcher: getting something back?

Yeah (NL.01.03.W).

As seen, with able-bodied beneficiaries, one of the activity fare administrator's primary concerns when considering a payment from *Bijzondere Bijstand* was with the applicant's perceived level of motivation, which was perceived as a good in kind for the payment of a grant. Dutch administrators were just as concerned however, with getting something they perceived to be of equal worth from the impotent beneficiary in return for a grant. Essentially, not only should such applicants have little control over their situation, they also had to display responsible spending patterns and be, by the paternalistic administrator's standards, 'really (visibly) poor'.

As the theoretical literature on the deserving and undeserving poor suggests (Cook 1979; Golding and Middleton 1982; Van Oorschot 2000; De Swaan 1998), the Dutch administrators considered that impotent applicants (not yet able to, or expected to work) with a relatively high degree of need (e.g. those with children, and those who had spent long periods on benefit) were *prima facie* 'deserving' of a grant. That said, applications for exceptional payments were not be taken on face value, and administrators were concerned with ascertaining the nature of the needy. For example, those perceived to have little control over their need (see vignette scenarios 2 and 4 in Appendix 3) simultaneously elicited a great deal of sympathy, alongside notions or concerns about fraudulent behaviour, from administrators.

In order to ascertain if applicants were 'undeniably sick' (Hill 1969) the vast majority of the Dutch administrators voiced that, as there were 'no doctors or nurses here!' (NL.01.01.M) they would send them to the (independent doctor situated in the) *GGD*². Administrators reasoned that, such applicants might actually be benefit 'malingerers', out to top up their earnings from the informal labour market

I always see if they *use* their health or if it's really health complaints.

Researcher: some people use their health as a..?

Yahh, there are many. They, first they start with a pain in their arm and when they see you are not convinced they

² *Gemeentelijke Gezondheids Dienst*: municipal health service

cannot work then they have an arm and a shoulder, and then they find a way to go. Then they have a knee and a, and then they have a, whatever they have. Just more and more. We have now a man from Turkey, 27 years (old), three children. At first he um, uh, had a little back problem, and now this was not enough. Now he has bronchitis from there, and now he's asthmatic; bronchitis and now he is getting mental problems. And every time when he sees, when we say '27 and a little pain in the back. Come on, and ok we huh? We take it that you can do uh, something, slight work, we have a light job'. (He says) 'ah, no light job'. He's getting stress. (holds her hands up to her head) so every time he's building it up. So, by the time he's thirty then his wife (will be) coming to wheel him in! it's really pitiful.

Researcher: [] I wonder why they. Why do they?

Ah, well with this person we think he is working black³ for it huh? So we think. Crazy people (NL.01.12.W).

In order to be eligible for a grant however, those judged by the *GGD*⁴ to be sick, and thus to have little control over their need or situation, also had to be by the paternalistic administrator's standards visibly, or undeniably poor. Ascertaining the latter was done by house visits, which, as a surveillance technique, served a number of purposes for administrators. House visits allowed the administrator to check the existence/condition of the item requested, and could also be used to check 'if people are cheating' (Piven and Cloward 1971:172). For instance an alert administrator on a house visit could pick up signs of fraudulent behaviour: indications of an undeclared source of income from the informal labour market perhaps, or of cohabitation from a supposedly single applicant.

³ This was a term used by the Dutch administrators to denote working in the informal economy.

⁴ *Gemeentelijke Gezondheids Dienst*: municipal health service

If the whole house is very sober, you know they don't have much money and they really need (the item requested). But, if there are all new goods uh, you can suspect something else (that) could have consequences for the assistance (they are receiving). So we have a (fraud bureau) - so you always have to be very aware (NL.01.10.W)

One of the most salient concerns of the administrators was to use the house visit not only to see that the item requested was actually 'needed', but to check that the applicant was, what they termed, 'really poor', and thus deserving of a grant. To be judged as deserving in the latter respect, the impotent applicant's home should show no signs of what administrators considered to be 'luxury' items like 'big televisions, lots of stereo equipment and very nice carpets' (NL.02.02.W). Such items signalled to the administrator that clients engaged in irresponsible spending behaviour, squandered their money on 'luxury' items and then asked the *Sociale Dienst* to supply the necessities of life (for instance cookers and washing machines).

(Discussing a recent decision to give a woman a grant for a washing machine) um, I went for a house visit to see what's in the house, so if they (would) have (had) a big stereo or television that size (motions with hands).... But it was very poor. Uh, her machine was already broke for two weeks so, and she has a child, so she has everything (to wash) by hand, and she has complained about (motions to forearms) (pain) here and here, um, and the furniture in the house was very old (lowers voice) *and sad*, so uh, that was, yeah [] house visits give you a good idea of how somebody is, how they live and what kind of person (they are) (NL.01.14.W).

Those impotent beneficiaries thought to be behaving themselves therefore: 'really poor', truthful, and with a lack of control over the need they now request payment for, were likely to be given a grant rather than a loan.

(Discussing scenario 4) I think in this sort of case we can say em, maybe yeah, because huh? It is most(ly) a fault of the ex-partner, so maybe it is not fair to get the money back (from her). So, I think this is a good example where we say, although maybe it should be a loan, we can give it to her (as a grant) because there are very special circumstances (NL.01.06.M).

(Discussing scenario 2) Because they are nineteen years on (social assistance), and they are not going to work because of their problems, and they have two daughters in the puberty, and they couldn't save any money because they (have been on benefit) for nineteen years, so yeah (they will receive the money in the form of a grant) (NL.01.05.W).

In sum, grants are used by the paternalistic activity fare administrators as a system of rewards and incentives. The payments therefore operated as a relatively flexible implementation method that helped them to do their job: get able-bodied applicants out of social assistance, and socially activate those perceived as not able to work. In Britain in contrast, as the following section of the chapter highlights, the factors affecting decision making concerning the award of a grant have as much to do with the Social Fund Officer's managerial concern of controlling the budget as with policing or influencing the behaviour of applicants.

'Think about the budget': grants in Britain

Unlike their Dutch counterparts, British Social Fund administrators were not concerned with awarding payment in order to get social assistance beneficiaries to comply with their reciprocal obligations for the receipt of social assistance. As outlined in the previous chapter, effectively Social Fund Officers perceived that

they were 'not allowed' to reward the behaviour of able-bodied deserving customers looking for work with grants.

Deserving, or as staff termed them, 'genuine' people in this configuration of welfare for a non-repayable grant are primarily non-'regular' customers with little control over the need presented. Community Care Grants were, in the officer's frame of reference, used for relatively narrow purposes: to keep people out of care; resettle people leaving care into the community; and to ease 'exceptional pressure' that families might face. Like their Dutch counterparts, Social Fund Officers considered whether or not the applicant could have exercised control over the need presented for payment an important issue, and were just as reticent not to award a grant to 'benefit malingerers'. In keeping with the principle of less eligibility, Social Fund Officers perceived that those supposedly impotent, but untruthful applicants who might actually have a deal of control over the need they presented for payment were

aggravating for the normal man in the street, who's working in a factory, or, doing just a normal, no high flying executive. And he sees (people 'signing sick' that) he's maybe been at school (with): can still go to the bookies, and can still smoke, and is walking with a stick, and not a thing wrong with them. Next thing you see them on the golf course. You know, that, that is annoying (B.01.DM1.W).

Determining the existence of illness, and hence the deservingness of the apparently impotent however, could not be done with a high degree of certainty. Unlike their Dutch counterparts, British officers, primarily reliant on documentary procedures, did not have the opportunity of sending the applicant to an

independent doctor to check the existence of any stated illness they had documented on their claim form. Instead staff relied on the DSS computer system to indicate the customer's receipt of any 'extra benefits' such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), the absence of which they reasoned signalled that supposedly impotent applicants 'can't be that bad' (B.02.DM1.W). Whilst the existence of any stated illness ultimately had to be taken 'on face value' (B.01.DM5.M) by staff, receipt of these benefits effectively served as an indication of deservingness: by providing administrators with an inkling that the customer may be under 'exceptional pressure', or that someone might face a 'threat of care'

(Discussing scenario 3) If the DLA care came up on the computer [] I would replace the cooker (with a grant). I would give them the cooker but I would say no to the beds (B.02.DM1.W).

However, the computer system could give no such inklings about the genuineness of beneficiaries whose need did not engender any 'extra benefits'. Ascertaining whether, for example, someone had been the victim of domestic abuse and therefore had little control over the need presented, was subsequently very difficult. Because of the client-customer relationship inherent in case-management, the Dutch administrators conversely, might have had a deal of contact with women in such situations (see scenario 4, Appendix 3), and thus know whether or not to trust their accounts. Social Fund Officers however, relatively devoid of face to face contact with applicants, were more disposed to

take the word of other agencies who might be involved with the woman, in order to

satisfy ourselves that her partner *was* violent.

Researcher: so how do you do that?

Social work department. Contact the customer: 'were the police involved? [] Have you been to see a lawyer? [] if you're saying that you've left your violent relationship, eh, we'd like you to prove that to us please'. Because people could be telling us something that's not true (B.01.DM3.M).

Indeed, in the main office of research in Britain trust and rapport established between the reviewing officer and a representative of an outside agency who might be familiar with the customer's situation, rather than between the customer and the Social Fund Officer was frequently seen as an important factor in identifying the deserving, or truthful applicant

At the review stage (the woman) would come in with a woman's refuge (worker), they always come in with a woman's refuge worker, in this area anyway, and that's where I get all my information, all the background. [] .. I wait 'till they come in and we can chat face to face, because em, we've got a good rapport. And I know that they're not going to tell me a lie, and they know where I sit, and how I'm going to look at things, um and just the mere fact that (the refuge worker is) sitting there, that I can do something, because they're not going to bring these people in if they know that they're (lying) yep (B.01.DM2.W).

As seen, similar issues surrounding the truthfulness of impotent applicants (and hence control over need presented for payment) were also important to the Dutch administrators, but these were combined with a concern to ascertain whether or not the applicant was 'really poor'. Conversely, in Britain's

configuration of social assistance, where administrators can rarely get such certainty from house visits, the latter concern is replaced with whether or not the customer is a 'regular', or has had a grant in the past.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Social Fund Officers were reluctant to award a grant to the heterogeneous group of customers they perceived to be, and had informally labelled, the 'regulars'. Such customers were thought to be persistently out to 'milk or screw' the system, or to 'top up their benefit', rather than being someone who, until now, had hidden their misery and asked for nothing (van Oorschot 2000). As Howe (1985:69) similarly argued, 'greedy and grasping' claimants were thought to hoard resources often at the expense of the 'genuine claimants' which, in the context of the present study, only served to compound the difficulty in managing an inadequate CCG budget, where need often went unmet by a grant.

The same group of people who know how to work one system, or milk one system, will milk another system. And it makes it harder for us 'cos we're now budget controlled, we've got to space it out [] there's sometimes ones where you feel 'God, I wish I could give you this'. But we just don't have the *money* (B.01.DM1.W).

Whilst dealing with, refusing and deterring applications from such customers was a daily part of their job, Social Fund Officers felt that they could not always refuse a 'regular' claimant a CCG, because such applicants had come to 'know what to put down to get themselves a grant' (B.03.DM2.W). Ideally however, customers fitting the directions for a Community Care Grant (or a discretionary Crisis Loan)

should 'get one go at it' (B.02.DM2.W) and be granted payment once or as rarely as possible. In order to manage the budget then, behavioural concerns in this configuration of social assistance, where staff were concerned with processing a large number of exceptional need applications in relation to a small budget, include the customer's claiming 'history', the less applications they have made, the more deserving they are considered

(Discussing scenario 2) We tend to look at the history, although it's probably not strictly (allowed). I would tend to, on this one, check when they had last received beds. [] it depends on the circumstances: if they'd had beds in the last few years, you wouldn't expect these beds to be.

Researcher: gone

Within that time. So that would reduce the priority. Obviously beds are a high priority, but if there had been another few applications [] we can't say 'you're lying'. We can say 'it's unlikely that the items are needed' (B.03.DM1.W).

(Discussing scenario 4) Unless she's got a previous history, you've got to. I mean if she did it twice, I would be. [] we would look in the computer system 'oh, she got a grant in such and such, I wonder what that was for?' we could probably check it that way (B.01.DM1.W).

A further strategy used to ration scarce resources when administering grants was to give customers the minimum amount of grant they felt able to 'get away with' (B.01.DM6.W). Much of their day was thus spent eking out the grants budget over a large number of claims. In their daily struggle to manage the Community Care Grants budget, British administrators were frequently aware that they were affecting peoples' quality of life. Much of their time was spent (often in

consultation with their colleagues) making what they termed 'judgement calls', as previous research also found (Huby and Dix 1992), and agonising over relatively small amounts of money.

A disabled pensioner visiting her daughter in hospital, uh, she's asking for uh, visits twice per day, seven days per week. Our budget can't stand that. So, yes, you can see it's essential. Uh, would you pay that? No you wouldn't. Pick brains about that. 'How does twice a week sound instead of fourteen times a week?' Ok. On the back of that, can we sustain uh, the cost of a woman visiting, and her husband or partner, visiting a new-born kiddie, seriously ill in (a children's hospital) (B.O1.DM4.M).

In effect, these organisational constraints often necessitated that Social Fund Officers consider grants and loans for the deserving simultaneously, in an attempt to mix and match the forms of payment available to them to meet the applicant's need in full.

(Discussing scenario 3) A grant for a bed, and the offer of a Budgeting Loan for a cooker (B.01.DM1.W).

(Discussing scenario 3) I would be looking at the cooker (as a grant) um, to relieve any exceptional pressures depending on the budget. But if not, the cooker and the other two beds I would be considering either under a Crisis Loan for items, or looking at the Budgeting Loan first to see if they could get a Budgeting Loan for them to claim that (B.01.DM2.W).

Thus in the context of a budget limited fund, whether the applicant is deserving/faultless of blame, is only one of the administrator's concerns. Often, Social Fund administrator's responses to the vignette scenarios of potentially deserving applicants included 'it depends on the state of the budget' (B.01.DM5.M). Thus, where the Dutch administrators considered washing machines a necessity for

'deserving' applicants, in Britain they were seen to represent a drain on the budget, and were only considered when applicants had 'health problems'.

A washing machine, I don't know, you know. I mean we're pretty hard, if the children are eight and twelve ok. But a washing machine: everybody's got one I know that. But, but if she can wash in a sink or hand wash. I know that's pretty basic, but if she's no health problems then whatever, and we've got to think about the budget, all the time, you know (B.01.DM3.M).

As the last participant's quote demonstrates, Social Fund Officers frequently referred to themselves as 'hard' and more often 'cynical', which constitutes a striking contrast. Essentially, the fictional characters in vignette scenarios 2 and 4 elicited a great deal of sympathy from the Dutch administrators. Both were constructed as faultless of blame, and in the case of scenario 2, were thought to have endured nineteen years on the social minimum, be 'really poor', and have many health problems along with a child with an eating disorder: they would thus get everything they had asked for.

In Britain, conversely, whilst such applicants were constructed by Social Fund Officers as being under 'exceptional pressure' or 'at risk of care', sympathy for the families was tempered by a sense of cynicism and the use of what staff termed as 'black humour'. In effect perhaps these constituted organisational coping strategies (Sims et al 1993), and allowed staff to (mostly, but as chapter 8 will highlight, by no means always) disengage their emotions. In the context of the budget-limited fund, staff perceived that it simply was not possible to meet all of the need presented to them. The use of 'black humour' and disengagement

were further encouraged perhaps by the documentary procedures of the Social Fund, which facilitate little human contact between staff and customers. Thus staff spoke of continually processing, or dealing constantly with what they informally termed 'hard luck stories'; of being 'fed up' reading all day about 'exploding cookers everywhere', so much so that one participant reasoned that 'there should be Boom! Boom! Going off all round the country – because they never just stop working: cookers, they always blow up', (B.02.DM2.W) and 'people peeing in every bed they had'.

The latter part of the chapter illustrated the divergence in the administration of grants. Both sets of exceptional need administrators were concerned to control, but with more emphasis on either budgets or the behaviour of applicants. Free from budgetary concerns, the Dutch administrator was able to use this form of payment as an implementation method to do their 'people-changing' job: reinforce or attempt to influence the behaviour of social assistance beneficiaries. In Britain conversely, where managing the budget is an essential part of the Social Fund Officer's job, the administration of grants becomes a complex mix of controlling money and morals. On the ground, these factors influenced who got a grant and why.

'They have to pay it back'. The administration of loans

The administration of exceptional payments by way of a loan highlights further differences in the two countries under study. There were clear differences for example in the amount of administrative discretion or control over such awards. In the Netherlands, administrators had more discretion in deciding whether a client should be awarded payment via *Bijzondere Bijstand* or not; as a grant or a loan. In Britain conversely, Budgeting Loans were perceived by Social Fund Officers to be for 'anyone' to get; assessed on 'objective' criteria by the computer system (length of time on a qualifying benefit; amount of outstanding debt), and not by way of the administrator's discretion. In other words, administrators in Britain perceived that they were unable to deny an applicant a Budgeting Loan.

That said, administrators in both countries perceived loans as enforcing obligations because clients and customers had to pay the money back. In contrast to grants, loans were primarily perceived as 'individualised punishments' (Dean 1991); as 'sticks' to chastise the undeserving able-bodied unemployed, who 'should be working', and as a 'safe bet' in instances where administrators perceived that it was, or would be, difficult to get certainty over the supposedly impotent, but possibly fraudulent, applicant's exceptional need.

This form of exceptional payment was used in both countries to enforce a degree of 'responsibility' in the irresponsible able bodied poor, who were thought to have a deal of control over their situation, and who administrators perceived blatantly flouted the widely held value 'that incomes are earned from work' (Townsend 1979:823). Administrators reasoned that ultimately they were unable, (and in the

case of the British officers formally unconcerned) to force such applicants to the labour market. They perceived that awarding, or offering them a loan 'which they had to pay back' rather than a grant at least did not make it any more attractive for them to remain on social assistance. That said, there were some subtle cross-national differences. In the Netherlands loans were effectively used to 'chastise' those who were not seen to be complying with their obligations for the receipt of social assistance, whilst in Britain conversely, Social Fund Officers were often keen to enforce a less eligibility status on undeserving applicants.

Loans in the Netherlands: Chastisement

In the Netherlands a salient theme elicited from the paternalistic administrators was that to give (especially a grant) to someone who was failing to fulfil their reciprocal obligations, i.e. was able to work, but was perceived not to want to, would do nothing for their motivation. Giving claimants money would do little to encourage them to get out of social assistance and attain self-sufficiency because all of their needs were being met by social assistance. In the activity fare context therefore, reciprocity can function as a 'principle of exclusion' (Komter 1996:299) for those who were not considered to be fulfilling their mutual obligations. A minority of administrators for example considered that unmotivated applicants should be given nothing from *Bijzondere Bijstand*.

(Discussing scenario 3) I want to know why he's in unemployment? Why is he unemployed? This kind of. 42 years old is very young, so I would. No. I would say 'you can go to any factory and you can go and work'. So I wouldn't give him it, this, because, yeah, he's young, he can work, and why hasn't he (NL.01.07.W).

More often however, as the last chapter outlined, activity fare administrators were confronted with the moral ambiguity inherent in trying to meet the needs of the able-bodied, and assumed to be, unmotivated beneficiary, whilst also seeking to activate or maintain/instil labour discipline (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:37).

Ultimately, generosity, i.e. giving a grant to those who lack an attitude of responsibility and reciprocity is constrained by the need for labour discipline. In their quest to 'people-change', the Dutch administrators considered that subsidies alone were no solutions, rather, what was needed here was 'behavioural change' (Anderson 1991:9). As the administrators saw it, they had to 'break' the client's cultural acceptance of a life in long-term unemployment. Such clients were perceived by some administrators as having

created their own image about their life and about their world, and you have to break that before you can make them see that, that they're able to do a lot more than just sit in that little world. You have to break that image he has first; (get him to see) that he is not worthless and he can do a lot. There is more ways for him, or that there is work for him; the situation can be changed, he has to see that for himself [] it doesn't just change with me giving them the money. It means they have to change their lifestyle, and they have to change the way they do their finances (NL.01.04.W).

It is thus with such clients, as Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:38) argue, that the contradictions in welfare provision, i.e. symbolic clashes between generosity and the symbols of work, responsibility and proper family and personal behaviour are manifest. The concern for the Dutch administrators then becomes to 'grant relief whilst preserving the work ethic, controlling deviance and maintaining labour

discipline'. As seen, whilst case-managers might be inclined to use a grant as a 'carrot' to the labour market for such applicants (provided they signed a contract promising to 'got to work'), the primary source of control that the *consulates* could exercise was to award payment in the form of a loan rather than a grant, in order to provide a spur back to the labour market.

I don't think it's a (grant) but it will be a loan by us. So I wouldn't give it to, I wouldn't give (grant) him this because, yeah, he's young, he can work, and why hasn't he? (If he were to get payment as a grant) he's then not motivated (to work) because he gets anything, everything from us (NL.01.07.W).

I think that they could get a loan, but I wouldn't just give it to them because he's not that old and uh, one of these (applicants in scenario 3) can stay at home and the other (can work). [] it's not motivating to give everything, because it's too easy then (NL.01.11.W).

In the Netherlands the administrator would not only give such applicants a loan, they would also give them what might be considered 'a good talking to'. Administrators perceive that what the male beneficiary in scenario 3, for example, really needs is a change of attitude and behaviour, to take responsibility for his family by working and providing for them. Ultimately, the applicant was seen to be asking for things that he in his role as a father and a husband, and not the state, should be providing. He was shirking his responsibility as breadwinner, and in the Dutch configuration of welfare, this is what he would be told.

(discussing scenario 3) They don't get it all. Only maybe the bed for the child, maybe. And I think that's all, and uh, a very hard talk for responsibility, strong talk.

Researcher: to stress that?

Well, 'you are making children, then you have to take the responsibility of being a family'. And as well for his wife, because uh, she let it happen to have babies. 'You are both responsible', yeah. Because of the rules we have (they are) eight years unemployed, uh, they should get things easier. But the responsibility of having your family is more important.

Researcher: to bring up your family, to provide for them?

Yeah, yeah (NL.01.12.W).

(discussing scenario 3) 'you have two children, you have little money, you create a third child, and you just throw everything away from your previous child. And now you think you can just apply and we're going to give it'. Um, I don't know what kind of a person he is, but if you see those people who are very long on, on welfare, or quite long on welfare and are creating children and children and children, they're making their own situation a lot tougher. Not that. You can not say to somebody: 'you can't have children'. But, it's, you know? It's a reality sense which they kind of lack. That already makes it clear why they're probably on welfare. If you are creating children when you have no money at your back, and, and the presumption that somebody else is going to solve it for you (NL.01.04.W).

One issue not found with British administrators, was the 'proximity to us' (De Swaan 1988) as a condition of deservingness. Van Oorschot (2000:39) suggests for example that the typical characteristics of the most undeserving would incorporate a 'needy person who is able but not willing to get himself out of trouble, who has not contributed a great deal to the community from which they now ask for help, whose neediness is not that serious and who has an identity different from the potential helpers'. On the latter point a minority of administrators voiced that they 'saw this type of behaviour a lot' with Dutch

immigrants, who, as Spies and van Berkel (2001) point out are over represented in the social assistance population in the Netherlands.

This is a case I often see with uh, foreign people. The man doesn't want to (work) or feels sick or ill, and the woman isn't, well, I may not say it, but she's not allowed to, from the husband in most cases. And, (they have) a lot of children. The women sometimes want to (work), but it's not in their culture and, it is in ours, but not in theirs (NL.01.11.W).

Loans in Britain: enforcing less eligibility

In Britain conversely, Social Fund Officers perceived that they were unable to deny an applicant a Budgeting Loan. This relative lack of control, served as a source of frustration at times because officers perceived that customers could effectively get loans for 'anything', including drink and drugs. The latter perception was especially riling in the context of a budget-limited grants fund, which officers perceived was vastly under funded by Government.

Notwithstanding the latter point, Social Fund Officers, like their Dutch counterparts perceived that loans should be given to the irresponsible able-bodied, as well as to the 'regulars'. As the latter were thought to be out to 'milk or abuse' the system, Social Fund Officers reasoned that refusing such applicants a grant and encouraging them to apply for/making them the offer of a loan, meant that such customers were 'not really screwing the system, because they have to pay it back' (B.01.DM6.W).

As seen in the previous chapter, the Dutch administrators made recourse to 'cultures of unemployment' (Engbersen 1989) in regard to who they perceived as the 'irresponsible' undeserving. Social Fund Officers, however, seemed more disposed to the perception that some rational and calculating beneficiaries were encouraged by the social security system to 'abandon all responsibility, because the social will provide' (B.03.DM2.W), and thus to remain, or become dependent on benefit instead of taking (low-paid) work. The applicants in scenario 3, for example, are primarily constructed as being out to 'top up' (what the officers perceive as) their already generous benefit level due to them being one of the 'client groups that have five, six children, while on *social security*' (B.01. DM5.M) which they are then able to get extra premiums for.

(Reads scenario 3) ...mhm, typical, having all their children while on benefit. There was one the other day, this chap, and he had a, he did have a disabled child, and you feel sorry [] I think they had three or four children, and it was causing a lot of distress, which it must do. And then he cheerfully says 'my wife's pregnant again'. Pfft, and I thought, 'in this day and age', when, em, unless they had some strong beliefs about birth control. Which they're far and few between these days (B.02.DM1.W).

Therefore British administrators perceive that the family, devoid of any moral excuse from paid labour, are already more eligible than many independent labourers (including, incidentally, themselves as Civil Servants) and thus get 'more money than the majority of people that are working' (B.02.DM1.W) from remaining on the 'passport' benefit of social assistance

There's no incentive for them to go out and work. Its. The system's all wrong. It makes it too easy for them: there's no

incentive. I mean not for the single person. I wouldn't like to live off of fifty-three quid a week. No way. But the people who've got families, and kids, it's all these hidden benefits they're getting (B.02.DM1.W).

Whilst not formally responsible for the calculation or administration of the beneficiary's income support levels, Social Fund Officers are concerned about them, and reasoned that such customers could never 'earn' as much through their own efforts as they were able to receive in benefit payments.

(Reads scenario 3) see? There you go. He's been unemployed for eight years, and they've got three kids. (The participant had earlier been relaying a conversation between staff concerning people who apply to the Social Fund to 'milk the system'). I think they're looking at it: 'it's just a top up of benefit'. The same as having children: it's a top up of benefit. [] ...a bloke: he's got five kids, he's been on benefit since 1990, his benefit rate is three hundred and something. He's got child benefit on top of that. He's not paying full rent; he'll not be paying council tax. They get free, free school dinners, which is what? £1.25 a day for possibly five children. Eh, they get access to interest free loan. They get everything that's going: that man couldn't earn that. No way. The system should be that you get paid for the amount of children you've got when you come on benefit, if you have any more that's up to you. [] why should they not pay poll tax, God. They're getting their dustbins, education, and God knows what else [] we all have to pay (B.01.DM1.W).

In short, in both countries, those perceived as able-bodied irresponsible social assistance beneficiaries who (for whatever reason) remain on welfare rather than taking a job, are constructed by the administrators as undeserving of a grant, and instead are penalised with a loan. Whether the major theme is to chastise beneficiaries into 'working with them', or to make them 'less eligible' than the lowest independent labourer, such strategies can be considered as (either

explicit or implicit) attempts to enforce the value of work by giving the irresponsible able-bodied applicant the 'less attractive' form of exceptional need support (Higgins 1980:4).

Loans were also given in both countries where the administrators perceived that it was, or would be difficult to get a high degree of certainty over the supposedly impotent applicant's exceptional need. Vignette scenario no 4 (see Appendix 3), a scenario of a woman and her children fleeing domestic violence, was a situation with which both sets of administrators seemed more than familiar, and which elicited the strongest concerns of 'fraudulent' claiming. The most salient themes in this respect were the administrators' suspicions that the woman had either entirely fabricated the account, or more often, that she would, or had resumed a relationship with her partner and the couple were now conspiring together to defraud the municipality/'social' into giving them money. Furthermore, in both countries administrators were often reticent to award payment to the same women more than once, even when they recognised a cycle of abuse in situations of domestic violence. This was either because they seemed at a loss to understand why women in these situations repeatedly returned to their abusive partners, and/or (in Britain), because of the budget.

Essentially, women who could not provide proof that they had been in a violent relationship or that they did not have the items they now requested for payment were suspected of fraud. If administrators could not satisfy themselves on the

latter issues from the (diverse) procedures available to them then they would be more inclined to award payment as a loan rather than a grant.

The Dutch administrators perceived that deciding on a form of payment had a lot to do with whether or not they 'trusted' the woman who would be on their case-load of clients, and who they may have met with a number of times.

If you see this it's always, um, it has a lot to do with trust. And if this person uh, uh? You've seen her regularly, and if this person gives you the feeling that (her story is) upright and there's not, there's no side things, well I think, um yeah, I would try to give her the best. But it, it has, it's a tricky thing em because a lot of people can give you that feeling but, yes.

Researcher: but what is going on?

Yeah, well maybe she's back with him. This is a really difficult situation (NL.01.02.M).

However, as the latter participant's quote illustrates, even with relatively frequent face-to-face meetings with such clients, administrators were always aware that they could in fact be being duped. In cases where there was doubt, and suspicions of fraudulent claiming from her (and her partner), administrators preferred to err on the side of caution and award a loan rather than a grant. One participant, in a quest to see if the items were 'really needed', had constructed what he thought to be a novel (and rather paradoxical) way to ascertain how truthful such clients were by their desperation for the items in question; which could be judged by their acquiescence or willingness to accept a loan rather than a grant.

Well in case of doubt, I think I would [] have to see if it would be a loan.

Researcher: would it be a loan if you had any doubt?

Yeah, yeah. Sometimes uh, I present it as a loan just to see how people react. When they say 'well, if it's a loan I don't want it'. sometimes .. well, some people don't want loans, but sometimes the answer is based on that it's not really necessary (laughs). If the washing machine really is broken, well, you can't live without it .. and then (the client should be thinking) 'I don't (care) if it's a loan or a grant, I just need the washing machine' (NL.01.09.M)

It was not only women who they suspected of being fraudulent or untruthful that they would award a loan to in such circumstances. A victim of domestic violence or not, one of the primary concerns of the paternalistic administrator was that of enforcing responsible spending patterns amongst the poor. Should such applicants' home circumstances display any signs of what they considered to be 'luxury' items therefore, they were considered undeserving, and would be given a loan, or nothing at all.

I need to know what's happening there. .. if there's a big television and that kind of thing. That's not uh (laughs) .. that's not the necessary things. A washing machine and two children, you need a washing machine with two children, three children. But if you have a television and a stereo and all kind of debts and no washing machine, I think ok. (laughs) .. You must learn the people also to get responsibility for their own actions huh? So um, 'ok you have money, you buy a television and you come here to get a washing machine?' .. if she says 'yeah I bought the television a month ago' huh? Then I say, 'ok well you can't get a washing machine from me' (NL.01.15.W).

In Britain, as the following participant's quote highlights, the administrative concern was not just that the woman could be a 'regular' or 'back with him'.

Administrators perceived that there was a further possibility that the couple was actually involved in a conspiracy to fraud 'the social' and get a (council) house in another area.

You'd have to look more into the background of that. Em, because you get people who go into the woman's refuge all the time. And they're in and out, and in and out. It may well be that she's done this before, and she's maybe had a Community Care Grant in the past, for setting up a home. It's not unusual, um, for them to have a history of leaving their husband; getting a house, going back to the husband; woman's refuge; getting a house. It goes on all the time. [] and a lot of people *come*. It's a way of getting a house. [] they're not averse to putting themselves in woman's aid, because they want out of the area that they're living in.

Researcher: I never thought of that.

And they go into woman's refuge, and they're willing to stay there for a month. It's quite nice in the woman's refuge I think. I've never been in there. It's apparently. You should arrange to go and have a look. And then they get allocated a house. Then the husband, then some of them reconcile with their husband, he comes back [] and they've a nice little house next to their (relatives)

Researcher: I never thought of that.

Mhm. They do that all, they do that quite a lot. [] em, so depending on what had happened in the past, it might well just be a Budgeting Loan, for a cooker and a washing machine. She might not be classed as under exceptional stress 'so what. You've done it five times before, you've had a grant for these items, you should really be trying to get them back' (B.O1.CSM.W).

Here again we see the Social Fund Officer's concern (not entirely absent from the Dutch responses in this scenario) with 'regular' applicants. However, this concern is not only because they perceive that regular applications may be a sign of fraudulent applications. Some officers recognised that there were '*bad*

bastards out there' (B.01.DM5.M) whose partners were trapped in a 'cycle of abuse' (B.01.DM5.M). Even in such instances where administrators were prepared to accept that women had suffered repeated assaults however, working under a budget-limited grants fund saw them reticent to award to the same woman 'again' because of the budget.

There are cases that we've had, where, there's been no doubt about it: domestic violence has happened, where they've had two payments. Because they've set up home one place [] they've got it all set up. And then the man's found them, destroyed the house again, and then they've moved on, and they've come into our area. So sometimes you go into the computer systems and you can see they've had it already. So initially, your thought is 'finish it. Boom. Nothing. You've had that. We can't sustain this'. But then you start to think, and find out that there's genuine reasons, you know (B.01.DM6.W).

Having no budgetary constraints to worry about, the paternalistic administrators seemed more frustrated, or let down by women who returned to their abusive partners.

most of the times it's happened (the beating/violence) but then they go back (to him) and you have given all new things and, even with the violence (she still goes back to him) (NL.01.03.W).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that making sure that the 'right people' got the right form of exceptional payment was very important to both sets of administrators, who thus acted, not with a 'dead bureaucratic hand' (Dean 1991:3), but rather with meaning when they awarded payment as a loan or a grant. Moral categorisations

of clients by administrators always preceded organisational and legislative categorisations, even if they could not always determine who got what form of payment.

Furthermore, the forms of payment at the disposal of the two sets of administrators were, as seen, tightly tied to their perceptions of deserving and undeserving applicants. Grants, were thus given by the Dutch 'paternalistic people changing' administrators as a reward or a carrot to good (reciprocal and responsible) behaviour. In Britain, where managing the CCG budget is part of their daily job, attempting to influence or reinforce behaviour for Social Fund Officers becomes more difficult. Grants were primarily for the impotent and non-'regular' customers. Even then, 'depending on the state of the budget' loans often had to be simultaneously considered by the officers in an attempt to meet need. That said, the administrative meanings attributed to loans in both countries saw them primarily administered as metaphorical 'sticks' used to punish the behaviour of 'work-shirkers and fraudsters'. Thus, Townsend (1979:824) argues that those who defend the flexibility in meeting need which discretionary systems permit forget that the same flexibility exposes social assistance beneficiaries to unconscious, if not conscious manipulation by staff on behalf of society and its approved values.

The present chapter has shown however, that those who actually seek to administer exceptional payments in accordance with 'society's values' have to work through their specific organisational contexts and constraints. These clearly

influence the degree to which administrators can explicitly regulate the behaviour of the poor by using grants and loans as disciplinary mechanisms or as a system of individualised rewards and punishments, to normalise or effect the substantive control of individual behaviour (Dean 1991:31).

Dutch 'activity fare' administrators are able to use loans and grants as an explicit form of social control, in that they seek to meet need whilst explicitly regulating behaviour in accordance with the values of work and personal and family responsibility and behaviour. British Social Fund Officers however do not have the time, resources or methods which would allow them to work on the 'habits and economies of the poor' (Dean 1991:57) in the same way. Rather, they are impeded both by their concerns to manage the budget for Community Care Grants, and the perceived separation of the Social Fund from the wider welfare to work context.

This chapter has begun to illuminate that, in both countries under study, the need of the applicant is only one consideration for those who administer exceptional payments. The nature of the needy is just as important. From a comparative perspective, such concerns have implications for theoretical conceptions of 'human need' on which such systems are argued to be based, and to which the following chapter turns.

Chapter 8 Social Assistance Beneficiaries can't be Choosers: Administrative Notions of Needs and Wants

This chapter is concerned with the concepts and theoretical models of the workers who are professionally engaged in the business of meeting (Smith 1980:68) and hence 'interpreting' (Fraser 1989:154) need. Essentially, it highlights that administrators operate with a mega conception of 'normative' (Bradshaw 1972:640) need which contains conflicting elements rather than with a fixed and universal definition. Whilst, as we would expect from the theoretical literature, absolute and relative understandings (Doyal, and Gough 1991; Ignatieff 1984; Sen 1983) can be discerned in Britain and the Netherlands respectively, notions of need are essentially contextual and constructed in accordance with the perceived deservingness, rather than universal necessity of the applicant, in the social assistance contexts in which the two sets of administrators work. In sum, whether able to meet more or less of the absolute or relative needs of social assistance beneficiaries, administrators perceived that, (what they constructed as) 'wants' arising from the 'personal choices' of (irresponsible) social assistance beneficiaries were the province of, or the reward from, participation in the labour market, and should be curtailed in Sen's (1983) absolute sense.

The first part of the chapter highlights that the two sets of workers did not consider the needs of humanity in general: they considered the (exceptional) needs of social assistance beneficiaries. The needs of applicants for

discretionary payments were interpreted in accordance with the principle of individual responsibility, exemplified by the finding that administrators perceived that social assistance beneficiaries should ideally strive to 'live within their means' (B.01.CO.W) without making recourse to exceptional payments.

Notwithstanding this similarity in administrative perspectives however, generally speaking there was variation in the degree to which their specific social assistance organisational context allowed them to administer discretionary decisions about need in absolute or relative terms, explicated in the strategies they used to interpret need. The second part of the chapter thus illustrates that Social Fund Officers had to 'put their work hat on', and distance their needs as social beings from those of their customers, in order to interpret needs in terms of basic subsistence requirements (i.e. eating and sleeping). The Dutch administrators on the other hand, effectively devoid of any budgetary constraints, were found to make reference to relative notions of poverty and need. However, such judgements entailed an explicit focus on the relative social position (and social characteristics like class and gender) of the applicant. Compared with their British counterparts, the Dutch administrators were more concerned, not only with what people needed to survive, but also with what they were 'due' or what they deserved according to their merit and station in life (Ignatieff 1984:35).

The third part of the chapter illustrates that in the discretionary schemes under study, both sets of administrators are compelled to differentiate between, and socially construct, the 'needs' and the 'wants' of applicants. The latter conceptual

distinction can be seen to be of crucial importance for administrators in giving beneficiaries what they perceive to be their just desserts. It is in this way that 'felt' needs, 'expressed' (Bradshaw 1972:641) by the perceived irresponsible beneficiary, are subsequently (re-)interpreted as 'wants' by the administrator.

Working need out case by case, those initially deemed 'deserving' (in their respective social assistance contexts) were more likely to be constructed as being in 'need': paired, in the administrative frame of reference with the obligation to meet it with a grant where possible. 'Wants' conversely, carried no such obligations, and were often firmly married with what were perceived to be the 'personal choices' of the (irresponsible) undeserving. The latter differentiation it is argued underlies a strong administrative link between consumption, the freedom to choose, and production (Engbersen 1989) and administrators effectively seek to constrain the consumer choices of those who have irresponsibly exerted 'personal choice' by awarding such applicants a loan.

'They must live within their means'

The following section of the chapter highlights that in both countries under study, the exceptional needs of beneficiaries were not considered by administrators in isolation from the wider social assistance schemes in which they were situated. Such considerations included a recognition of the social assistance benefit levels in each country. Essentially, British administrators considered that it was just not possible for people to secure the 'basics of life' (B.01.DM5.M) when reliant on benefit for any length of time, especially if they were single (and able-bodied).

Because what I've always said is: no one who's playing the game straight, *can live* for ten years on social security. There's no way.

Researcher: because it's simply?

The benefit levels are *too low*. [] No one, who's playing the game, could possibly live. I mean as a single person you're on what is it now, £53. I mean ok, [] they get their rent and council tax paid, but that's not cash in hand, £53! (laughs) you know.

Researcher: you're not going to be doing a lot on that are you?

Even for the basics of *life*. Ah, a social life or anything... [] First thing that tells you there's something wrong, is if you walk into somebody's house, who's been repeatedly on benefit for years and they have a well furnished home. It's just not possible. *Absolutely* not possible. Um, there's something not right there at all, and that tells you. (B.01.DM5.M).

There was therefore a clear and strong administrative recognition that (even for the 'genuine people') because social assistance benefit levels were generally inadequate, many beneficiaries would have little option but to incur debt to meet their everyday living expenses.

That thousand pound limit (on Social Fund Loans), has been a thousand pounds for a long, long time. And that to me nowadays, isn't realistic. It's not realistic. I mean, if you've got a man, woman and four kids, a thousand pounds is nothing, you know? [] To be honest with you, I don't know personally, how people survive on the money they get in the first place. Um, for *us* to then pay them a loan and then take that money off, over and above that: that just blows my mind, you know? Em, because when we see what people are paying out, the genuine ones, that have got all their commitments like, and get their money every week, and try to do it, you're just like...

Researcher: 'How do you do it'?

How *do they* do it? They get themselves into debt, *that's* how they do it (B.01.DM6.W)

In the Netherlands conversely, administrators often voiced that, at least in the short term, benefit levels were specifically intended to cover the cost of clothing, and also included amounts for saving.

When someone has an *uitkering* from this office, in the total amount of money there is also a little budget for saving (NL.02. 02.W).

Nevertheless, despite these divergent perceptions of the adequacy of social assistance benefit levels, both sets of administrators seemed to consider that one of the most important links between social assistance and exceptional need payments was the regulatory function of enforcing individual responsibility. The concern that beneficiaries should endeavour to 'live within their means' is explicated clearly in administrative perceptions of immediate emergency payments in each country. That said, from a cross-national perspective there were country specific nuances, which are related to the perceptions of the adequacy of general benefit levels.

For example administrators perceived that those who had alcohol or drug addictions, which would be difficult to fund from general benefit levels in both countries, requested immediate payments. In addition however, British administrators further perceived that (relatively speaking a high volume of) customers requested immediate payments in order to pay off debts or to attend

parties, rock concerts and football matches. In other words they perceived that payments were being used by some beneficiaries in order to subsidise or as they termed it, 'top up', their low levels of benefit in an attempt to engage in some form of social participation.

We've really got to see this person in an emergency, em, as a consequence of a disaster, em if that's not happened, if they've placed themselves in that position, then unfortunately, then we're unable to consider a Crisis Loan. The need must have arisen in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster.

Researcher: so what kind of things would you consider that they would have placed themselves in that position?

Em, mis-spending their benefit, em, yeah, that's what we. We tell them that we're not here to subsidise their benefit. That we understand it's *not* a great amount to live on, however, that's what they're going to get, and they must live within their means and they must budget their money, because we're not here em to, to subsidise them. Em, really just spent money, lost money as well. We pay for lost money the once, usually, em however, we may pay it a second or third time, em, but again it's the customer's own responsibility to keep their money safe (B.01.CO.W).

The latter concern was also evident in the Netherlands. Social assistance beneficiaries were expected to do their utmost to manage on the amounts given without making recourse to *Bijzondere Bijstand*. As the following participant's quote highlights however, rather than needing to top up an inadequate general social assistance benefit level, here it was primarily perceived that the beneficiaries who most often asked for such payments were those who were addicted to either alcohol, gambling or (in the Dutch context) illegal and very expensive drugs.

When there really is a crisis, people can come immediately and we can do something for them - but always - (only) if it's necessary. So if someone em tells that he has lost his wallet, uh we want to have a report from the police that he has told them that he has lost his wallet. We want to uh see the last withdrawal from his bank account; and how much did he withdraw, um and if that's about 1500 guilders, where someone gets (only) 1500 guilders a month; and then puts it down his wallet and then loses his wallet, we. Yeah, we *always* ask 'why in the hell did you take *all* your money in your wallet' and em. Yeah-well, if it shows that the people is reckless about his uh, his .. life or the way he wants to live, yeah-well, we often tell them that it's their own fault and their own uh, uh yeah responsibility, their own responsibility um and that it's not very clever when you have only 1500 guilders to live from, to take it all out [] Quite often they're the people who are addicted to drugs, uh alcohol, uh gambling – because they need about 1500 guilders a *day*, so em, and that's a big problem of course if you only get 1500 guilders a month .. Especially if they're on drugs [] although a lot of drugs are legalised in Holland, they're still expensive, and the people who are on the drugs that are not legalised: well they're *really* expensive (NL.01.02.M).

As the latter participants' quotes suggest, rather than being concerned with the needs of a universal and abstract humanity, administrators, in their daily jobs were primarily concerned with the (exceptional) needs of social assistance beneficiaries, who, they considered, had a responsibility to try and get by without asking for more.

Perceptions of absolute and relative need

That said, the following section highlights that the specific social assistance organisational contexts (outlined in chapter 6) in which the administrators worked influenced the degree to which poverty was conceptualised in absolute or relative terms. This is explicated here through the administrative processes by which the needs of beneficiaries were reasoned in the two countries.

Essentially, in order to administer a budget-limited fund, British administrators had to distance their needs as social beings, and sometimes their absolute, or basic needs as humans, from those of their customers. In the Netherlands conversely, in the absence of budget limitations, the relative social status of the applicant can be seen to be of primary importance to the administrator in determining need.

Britain: 'It's *dreadful* when you think about it'

To a large extent Social Fund administrators perceived that their inadequate budget and the tight regulations for discretionary awards determined what could be classed as needs and what could not. As the previous chapters have highlighted, British administrators spoke continually about meeting only the most essential items of 'cookers, bed, bedding crockery and cutlery' with grants, which are entirely in keeping with absolute conceptualisations and definitions of poverty and related human needs for subsistence (i.e. sleeping and eating). Medium priority items, were essentially classed as non-essential:

'Fridge, washing machine, chest of drawers, wardrobes. Um, other kitchen utensils, uh such as well, an iron and ironing board, things like that are classed as non essential because at the end of the day if we went down to a Crisis Loan, would there be a risk to your health and safety - that's the bottom line - if your shirt was crumpled? (B.01.DM2.W)

In order to administer liberal provision, in which (as seen in chapters 6 and 7) Social Fund Officers struggled to award payment for items associated with the most basic of human needs, staff attempted to distance their social, and often even their shared basic human needs, from those of their customers. This was a process which one of them referred to as 'putting (their) work hat on' (B.01.DM6.W). They often stated that, when they stopped to think about it, they found this separation not only emotionally difficult, but also hypocritical.

For example, many of them felt that

We've all got our own sort of standards, naturally everybody has a personal thing of 'oh, I couldn't live without such and such a thing' or whatever (B.01.DM2.W)

However, due partly to budgetary constraints what they effectively had to say to customers was;

We're not here to make your home a home: we're here to provide you with the basic necessities. Any of the niceties of life: you'll just have to wait for' ... I mean we're so strapped, even if I awarded curtains, I wouldn't award curtain rails, because we'd say 'well, pin them up at night'. I mean it's things you wouldn't, you wouldn't do yourself. You're, you're having to (pauses) you're having to divorce yourself from 'this isn't me we're talking about here'.

Researcher: not my needs, or?

Yeah

Researcher: and that's because of the budget?

Yeah (B.01. DM1.W).

The way the budget is just now, you can sit on a bed, so you don't need a settee. I mean it's *dreadful* when you think about it. [] I think it's dreadful, you're having to say to somebody: 'you don't need a three piece suite, because you can go and sit on your bed'. I mean personally I would be insulted if somebody said to me 'you don't need a sofa, you can sit on your bed'. What, are you expected to drag your bed into the living room? But I mean, that's basically what we're saying to people. But I think it's wrong, but I mean that's just my personal. I think everybody, every human being has got a right to have at least, you know, standard and comfort in their own home (B.02.DM1.W).

How can I turn round to somebody and say 'you don't need a washing machine, you can hand wash or you can use a launderette'. How can I say that? Because if my washing machine broke down, I'd have kittens. If I phoned the engineer and he said 'I can't be out 'till Wednesday' I was having kittens, because I couldn't use my washing machine. I have been in that situation, you know, lately: 'Wednesday! Wednesday! What am I supposed to do 'till Wednesday'? You know. And I can turn round to somebody with two small children and say 'you can hand wash, or you can use a launderette'. But we're having to look after the budget, which, believe me we are (B.03.DM2.W).

The latter quotes imply that British administrators did not hold to such liberal understandings of poverty and human need in any 'normative' sense and previous research has similarly suggested that officers felt guilty at 'having to say no' (Huby and Dix 1992:93). In keeping perhaps with the 'minimal' public role of the state in a liberal welfare system, the hypocrisy that Social Fund Officers felt at telling people to do things they would not want to do themselves ('hand-wash

your clothes in the bath'; 'go to the shops everyday'¹) was often forwarded as a 'personal' opinion or feeling emanating from the 'private realm', rather than as a 'public issue'. However, whilst Social Fund staff may have felt uncomfortable denying the absolute needs of beneficiaries, it is argued later in the chapter that their perceptions of need were wholly in line with those that we would expect from the principle of less eligibility, argued to be inherent in liberal welfare provision.

The Netherlands: 'Why does he need a suit'

In the Netherlands conversely unlike their British counterparts the Dutch administrators operated with no such blanket base line of essential items that could be met by way of a Community Care Grant or a Crisis Loan. From a comparative perspective then, this left more room for judging the needs of beneficiaries in relative terms, and as previous chapters have highlighted, administrators often spoke about any given beneficiary's needs for participation in society. However, this section of the chapter highlights that discretionary decisions made by administrators on relative terms can be quite conservative in nature. Essentially, the needs of applicants are judged by administrators in reference to what they perceive the applicant's current social position to be, and as Ignatieff (1984) notes, in a stratified society all social positions are not of equal worth or status.

¹ These were not prescriptions, rather they were suggestions made to customers who asked staff 'what they were meant to do' without a washing machine or a fridge.

In this respect, whilst the Dutch administrators reasoned that a woman with children would 'need' a washing machine in order to fulfil her role as a 'mother', they often viewed the request for a suit from the hypothetical able-bodied applicant in scenario 1 (see Appendix 3) with a deal of suspicion or incredulity.

This might be related to their perceptions of his social position as a young and able-bodied proletariat: and their concern seemed to be whether a 'modern day hewer of wood and drawer of water' could really have secured a job interview that 'needed' a suit.

I would advise a person not to put any clothes on that uh, are not him. Do you know what I mean? (NL.01.08.M).

As the Dutch administrators perceived it perhaps, such an applicant might essentially be trying to be something *they considered* he was not. For example, several of the paternalistic administrators voiced that they would want to meet with the applicant to check, or in effect, regulate his employment expectations.

(would want to assess) how um, his idea of reality is, that he's applying on jobs that he's really able to get. You know he can solicitate to something he will never get (NL.01.04.W).

I would want to know more about what kind of an interview. Does he really have a chance for that job; is it something that he can do; is it realistic that he um, that something good would come out of it (NL.01.11.W).

These findings can be related to the theoretical position, which argues that activation in social assistance schemes is needed to facilitate the low paid, low

skilled sectors of a capitalist economy (Shragge 1997). A minority of administrators for example thought that a young able-bodied social assistance beneficiary should not be holding out, or waiting, for a job that required a suit.

Why does he need new shoes and a suit? Because when you are unemployed for four years you have to uh, take all the work that's available. He (can) work in a factory for example

Researcher: so, he doesn't really need to have a suit to?

No, I don't think so (NL.01.10.W).

He doesn't get it from me. He doesn't get it. Because he's 26 years old, and uh he can go in a factory. So, I don't think uh .. shoes and a suit .. No. I don't think it's necessary, and that's my opinion (NL.01.07.W).

A request for a suit for an interview did not seem to fit with administrative expectations of the type of jobs that 'someone like him' would be expected to apply for.

What kind of work is he applying for?

Researcher: would it depend on what kind of work it was or?

Yes.

Researcher: so if he was going for an office job?

Then I think it's more necessary than when he will go for uh to work in a .. in a cleaning job (laughs) (NL.01.16.W).

The shoes and the suit .. oh that's difficult. It would also depend on what kind of job it is, that he has to look nice. He

must (already) have something that he can. It doesn't really have to be a suit. I guess that when there's a good chance that he can get the job, then I would em, give him the travel.

Researcher: but not the?

The shoes and the suit? I doubt .. well, when it's .. when the job is for em, requires a suit, then maybe yes (NL.01.11.W).

As previous chapters demonstrated however, the majority of the Dutch administrators were willing to give such an applicant the items requested. As the above quotes testify however, this was not exclusively because he was perceived to need the items in order to flourish as a human being. Rather the administrators perceived that the items he requested might essentially get him to the labour market and hence to self-sufficiency.

Discretionary decisions on human need then are, in both schemes under study, contextually influenced by the goals of the organisation and the context in which the administrators work. Social Fund Officers' decisions on need are much constrained by the budget, which mostly decrees that only basic or absolute needs (primarily to eat and sleep) can be met by way of discretionary (Community Care Grants/Crisis Loan) awards. In the Netherlands conversely, budgets did not regulate decisions about relative need: the social position and the perceived deservingness of the applicant did. Comparatively speaking, these administrative processes of reasoning need highlight something of an irony or a paradox. There might well be more scope for equality in the administration of 'liberal' and budget-limited systems based on the universal though absolute human needs to eat and sleep. The administrative room created by the lack of

budgetary constraints in the more generous Dutch system however, effectively leaves greater scope for inequality: discretionary decisions biased and constrained by the perceived social characteristics of the applicant.

Constructing needs and wants

The latter part of the chapter highlighted that comparatively speaking, the organisational contexts in which the two sets of administrators work constrained the degree to which they were able to conceptualise need in absolute and relative terms. Theoretically, these findings are what we might have expected in the administration of 'social democratic' and liberal income maintenance provision in the Netherlands and Britain respectively.

The following part of the chapter argues however that notions of either absolute or relative need are not fixed and universal concepts in the administrative frame of reference. For the purposes of discretionary payments, administrators are concerned, in fact we may say that they are obliged² to reason the social assistance beneficiary's exceptional application, and 'the demand that the poor give reasons (for their need) is the demand that they show themselves deserving' (Ignatieff 1984:34). Essentially, rather than being an objective administrative concept, need was used in a dynamic way by the two sets of workers and socially constructed in accordance with the applicant's perceived deservingness.

As we saw in the previous chapters, clear patterns of country specific (depending on the social assistance configuration) 'deservingness' emerged in response to

the hypothetical scenarios presented to administrators. The nature of the needy: their perceived responsibility or control in the circumstances leading up to the request was one of the primary concerns of administrators when considering their discretionary decision. In the Netherlands, the most deserving of beneficiaries seen to be in need of a grant were those who acted in line with their responsibilities and obligations for the receipt of social assistance: either those who were motivated and actively looking for work, or those who could not work and who were 'visibly poor'. In Britain administrators perceived that they were 'not allowed to help the responsible people' trying to get a job, and subsequently viewed grants as being for the 'non-regular' and apparently impotent applicants.

The following part of the chapter illustrates that the existence of these patterns of discretionary decisions in the two countries under study hinge partly upon the administrative distinction between needs and wants. Administrators, like those who theorise need (Ignatieff 1984; Doyal and Gough 1991), pair the idea of a need with the idea of a duty or obligation to (try to, in the case of Social Fund Officers) meet it with a grant. Wants on the other hand carry no such obligations, rather, they are perceived as strictly the domain of the labour market. That 'wants' are not the province of social assistance discretionary payments implies that both sets of administrators ultimately seek to curtail the consumer and lifestyle 'choices' of social assistance beneficiaries in Sen's (1983) absolute sense.

² Because they have to justify their discretionary decisions.

'If you haven't got the money: you can't have it'

Bauman (1998:38) argues that 'the poor of a consumer society are socially defined and self-defined first and foremost as [] inadequate consumers'. Both sets of administrators took more than a passing interest in the consumption patterns of social assistance beneficiaries. It is not inconsequential in this respect that, in both the systems under study, administrators seemed especially pre-disposed towards the 'poor souls (found) sitting with absolutely nothing' (B.O1.DM2.W), whose material position was obviously relatively miserable yet largely accepted by them (Van Oorschot 2000).

Essentially however, the pity obviously evoked in such cases should not cloud the finding that administrators perceived it morally wrong for social assistance beneficiaries to aspire to any status other than that of an 'inadequate consumer'. Indeed, both sets of workers reserved some of their greatest scorn and criticism for those applicants who they perceived 'were not content to remain at the bottom of the consumer ladder' (Bauman 1998:31) and who wanted to enjoy 'the same joys of consumer life' whilst on social assistance, (like 'big televisions and luxury carpets') as other people boast(ed) to have earned' (Bauman 1998:73).

As the following quotes outline, in both systems under study, the right life for a social assistance beneficiary is thought to be a frugal one: not one in which they try to be a choosing (and 'borrowing') consumer and hence refuse to 'live within their means'.

Some people buy at five (shopping catalogues) and (have store card debts) and build up a debt for more than a thousand or maybe two thousand (guilders) or whatever .. someone who is very brutal and loves spending .. let it come let it go .. But, then they have money problems, so when they need a washing machine, we have to give it to them because of the poverty rules. But, someone who is eating only meatloaf and counts his money (thinking) maybe yes, maybe no (participant pauses and strikes the desk) he has to buy his own and for that I feel it is not very good (NL.01.12.W).

You've probably heard stories from the others too about grants: we have accepted there's severe risk and all the rest of it, and we've awarded what we consider high priorities, like bed, bedding, cooker, [] and they go and buy a television or a hi-fi. Or spend; get £20 a square yard carpet! [] They're the ones where you've got to say 'well, is this' [] I mean I empathise with them, that they've got a hard time. Coming up Christmas, kids are seeing this, that and the next thing on the telly. I accept they've got a hard time, saying no. [] people sign up for a (Budgeting) Loan, and then six months down the line they decide they can't afford it at the rate: because they've taken on other debts somewhere else. And this man's wanting (his Budgeting Loan repayments) reduced because he's taken on £40 a month [] payments for cable television. [] I thought 'yeah, get your priorities right'. Although in a certain sense I can sympathise that if you're long term sick or unemployed, what have you got to do but watch telly? But I can see it from their point of view too, but at the end of the day, if you haven't got the money: you can't have it. That's my opinion (B.01.07.W).

Underlying these concerns is an administrative link between what Engbersen (1989:77) argues are two of the most important cultural goals in Western societies: consumption and work. Whilst Bauman (1998:24) argues that the norm society primarily holds up is that of playing the consumer rather than the producer, the present research suggests that the administrative concern lies primarily with 'defective producers', whom they then seek to position as 'unfulfilled consumers'.

This is effectively done either by constructing a request from an 'undeserving' beneficiary as a 'want' rather than a need, or by limiting their consumer choices which, according to Bauman (1998:73) is the 'most painful of deprivations' in a consumer society.

'You've chose this'

In both countries under study the administrative responses to the hypothetical family in scenario 3 exemplify the twinning of personal 'choice' with wants, and the subsequent construction of the undeserving. As outlined in the previous chapters, the male applicant - and also his wife to a lesser extent - were largely perceived by both sets of administrators as irresponsibly raising their children whilst on social assistance. Identical reasoning processes, although more explicit in the Netherlands, were used to deny the applicant and his family a grant. Essentially administrators constructed the items requested not as 'needs', but as 'wants' that had arisen from an exercise in personal 'choice' to have more children and to move to a bigger house.

For example, in regard to the carpet requested by the hypothetical family for the extra bedroom, the question of control over the items requested is explicitly related to the necessity of the house move. As one Dutch administrator explained

When the moving is not necessary, we think that the other costs are also not necessary (NL.01.13.W).

Already deemed by administrators as having no moral excuse for not working the family's request is constructed as having arisen from an exercise in 'personal choice'.

It's their free choice to move, that's uh their responsibility. Three children, well, pfhh, they can sleep together for our sake (NL.01.12.W).

We think it's not necessary .. the children can sleep together in one room. If they choose to live in a larger home, they may, but we don't pay.. (NL.01.16.W).

Similarly, Social Fund Officers essentially refused to accept the family's 'need' to have moved. The items requested by the family, in the absence of health problems, or exceptional pressure, are therefore constructed as 'normal', or 'on-going' ones.

When the children are five, two and six months, they're little. A two year old and a six month can share, share a room. So if they had two or three bedrooms, I don't see the need to have moved (B.03.DM2.W).

I would need to know the sex of the children, right? Because if they're all the same sex, they can sleep in the same bedroom [] I mean ages five, two and six month, I mean I, as far as I'm concerned children of that ages can sleep in the same bedroom, it doesn't matter what sex they are [] in this scenario, they're little (B.02.DM1.W).

Similarly, for the cot and the pram in both countries it is the undeserving couple's 'choice' to have another baby, rather than any objective need that the infant might have for the items that justifies the administrator's discretionary decision to withhold payment as a grant.

They've had a, a a or have got a baby, that doesn't mean it's desperate that you get that. I mean we didn't cause the situation, so possibly a loan [] he created the situation (B.01.DM3.M).

(discussing what she would say to the couple should they ask for a review) (whispers and laughs) 'You've chose to have another child, um naturally it's needing a cot and it's needing a pram. If you've not got that, which I would assume you would have, um, and you didn't get it from your maternity grant, then it's a Budgeting Loan, because you've choose this' (B.01.DM2.W).

Thus whilst in the theoretical literature (van Oorschot 2000) 'children' are often given as a criterion of deservingness, and thus a pre-requisite for being considered in need, the present study argues that it essentially depends on whose children they are. As the previous chapter illustrated, whilst the children of the perceived impotent and thus deserving couple in scenario 2 (see Appendix 3) were often offered by administrators as reasons why the family should get a grant, the same was not true of the hypothetical couple's children in scenario 3. The implication of this of course, might be that administrators mostly perceive that able-bodied beneficiaries should be working before they make, what they perceive to be the 'choice' to have children, or at the very least, beneficiaries should not be having children whilst on welfare.

Decreeing the items requested as 'wants' rather than 'needs' was not the only strategy used by the two sets of administrators to try and constrain the consumer choices of those applicants they perceived to be (irresponsibly) exercising their personal choice. For example, some of the Dutch administrators, in an attempt

to deny the family one of the consumer pleasures of 'brand new things', laughingly commented that they would send the applicant and his family to the 'second hand shop',

For the new bed for the baby, I send them to (laughs) a second hand shop, yes, also for the *kinderwagon* (R.04.W).

We have also a second hand store here. Um, I can.. imagine that I say ok, go and get there .. your ..

Researcher: the things that you need?

Yeah, because I have a job and I'm working and I have money but my uh, furniture is also second handed so .. yeah (NL.01.15.W).

The Social Fund staff voiced that they were unable to be prescriptive and tell people where to buy their goods. Nevertheless, they recognised the 'shame' in 'having', rather than choosing to go to a second hand shop.

Some of the younger ones that come in, 16, 17 years old, and you talk to them like your own son, which you shouldn't. You feel like saying to them, 'you've no chance, you can't get these things, you'll maybe *have to go* to second hand shops, you'll maybe have to go to car boot sales'. Although we'd be shot down in flames by the welfare rights folk, for telling folk to go and buy second hand (B.01.DM7.W).

Far more salient in the British system however, indeed standard practise (in order to manage the budgets) in all of the Social Fund Offices researched, was to strictly limit 'consumer choice' to a small number of very specific and relatively inexpensive retail outlets.

for seventy five, eighty, reasonable, you can *buy* - it may not be your cup of tea, or mine, or someone else's - but the fact is, you can get a double bed for under a hundred pounds from (high street retailer) (B.01.DM4.M).

As the following participant's quote highlights, however, awarding grants in line with the prices at these retail outlets was, in line with the principle of less eligibility, ultimately considered sufficient for social assistance beneficiaries. Indeed, those who asked for more expensive items above and beyond the reaches of the basic models from these specific stores were seen as 'wanting' things that the lowest independent labourer could not get from working for a living.

(discussing a recent application, where, on health grounds a) letter comes in from the health visitor saying this couple *must have* a leather suite. They *must have* wood flooring because of the condition of this child. Now the first thing I said there was 'why *must* it be a leather suite'? You know? I mean, if I was in that set of circumstances and it was a choice between my child being *ill* or my child being better, I'd go out and buy plastic furniture, you know, if I had, was on a low income, me personally. And I would buy linoleum. I would take up all the carpets and I would put down cushion floor, linoleum or whatever I could get. Em, but this was the health visitor, applying *her* standards. Which is fair enough, because that's what she thought. Now that one, was refused, along all the lines. There was awards given, to enable the people to purchase, reasonable, from the (budget retail stores), right? And that went to review, and it was overturned.

Researcher: and they got a leather suite?

They got their wood floors, mhm. I don't think they got the leather suite but they got the wood floors. So, there comes a time where, you know you step back from it and say 'well look, this is a nonsense'. Because if this was a couple on a

low income (from work), they wouldn't be able to come to us and get all this. And if this was you and I. We would go for an alternative, and especially if your child's health's involved, you'd go to the ends of the earth to get your alternative. You know, so (B.01.DM6.W).

This link between work and consumption displays a certain amount of divergence in the two systems under study. Essentially, the undeserving's perceived reluctance to work can justify either giving them 'less' in the British 'safety net' system or giving them 'more' in the Dutch activation context. In Britain, the fact that they do not work justifies their 'less eligible' status;

You can't have it as your kind of standards, because, when I was going on about that, somebody said '*but*, your standards: you buy it yourself. So you can set your own standard, and you can set the standard that you consider to be a high priority, because you're buying it'.

Researcher: 'you work'?

'You work, you're buying it, you're in that position so you decide what *you* need. If it's a television the size of the room, that's your *priority*. *But*, when you're looking at somebody else's budget, when you were buying it for somebody else, it's not a priority', [] and I can see the sense in it. It's not a bottomless pit. But people are missing out, when they should be getting (B.03.02.W).

In the Dutch configuration of social assistance, this link between consumption and production also takes an added form in case-management. In effect, consumer goods are used as a 'carrot' to get the client to the labour market, and self-sufficiency. As the following participant's quote highlights, if the beneficiary agrees to comply with their re-insertion plan then that is taken as payment for the in kind for the goods. As seen earlier (chapter 6) under the new case-management system beneficiaries would be asked what *they* thought they

needed to get to work The items are given, not because of any recognition of need on the part of the administrator – but rather as part of a ‘contract’, which is meant to change the applicant’s behaviour. The choice being constrained here by the administrator is the choice to remain ‘unmotivated’ on benefits.

If he says ‘I need a computer to practise at home’. ‘Ok, we get you a computer and you can practise your things at home, and that’s the way your gonna to work’. Then you say ‘ok in three months we’re gonna put you on the *traject*. [] Now, this is the school where you can get your computer education, and then we’re gonna follow it’. And when he is going to work with us: he is active in it, well then we say- every three months- ‘ok, put a part of it off - a thousand guilders (of the price of the computer) is free now’ (NL.01.12.W).

The key to understanding the above administrative responses to, and constructions of, needs and wants between and within countries, is the attempt to enforce self-responsibility in beneficiaries.

Conclusion

Having explicated the contextual dimension of need, and the situated process of defining and meeting it (Smith 1980:68) this chapter has shown that, unlike need theorists and philosophers, those who administered exceptional payments did not consider or interpret the needs of an abstract humanity. Rather they considered the needs of social assistance beneficiaries.

As seen, the process of defining and meeting need in the two countries under study was structured by the organisational context in which the two sets of administrators worked, which effectively informed the degree to which they could

administer payments according to absolute/liberal or relative/social democratic conceptualisations of poverty. Comparatively speaking, in Britain the budget determined that discretionary decisions be made in relation mostly to absolute conceptions of human need, whilst in the Netherlands it was the relative social position of the applicant that regulated and determined decisions on need. Paradoxically, the chapter highlighted that whilst there was more recourse to relative notions of need in the Dutch discretionary system, this potentially leaves space for greater inequality than can be found in the British liberal, and blanket basic need system.

The chapter further illustrated that in a discretionary system, need must effectively be interpreted and socially constructed by administrators. Thus, it is argued that, rather than operating with objective or fixed and stable notions found in the conceptual and theoretical writings of absolute and relative need, in practise the social construction of need by administrators was dynamic and contingent. Essentially, need as an administrative concept is reserved for those who either have no choice but to be poor (impotent) or (in the Netherlands) those able-bodied who are perceived as trying to get themselves out of it. Those beneficiaries thought to be able to exercise control over their poverty and who were therefore perceived as exerting personal choice were firmly constructed by both sets of administrators as 'wanting' rather than needing something. As seen, the perception of administrators was that 'wants' and personal choice were the domain of the labour market.

Concomitantly, there was a strong relationship between work and consumption in the administrative frame of reference. Both sets of workers perceived that social assistance beneficiaries, by definition 'inadequate producers' had a responsibility to 'live within their means, to manage on what they got', and to accept the status position of an 'inadequate consumer' (Bauman 1998). Whether operating with more or less recourse to notions of absolute or relative conceptions of poverty, administrators sought to constrain the 'choices' of social assistance beneficiaries in Sen's (1983:161) absolute sense.

We turn now to the final chapter, which is concerned with summarising the main findings and concluding the thesis.

Chapter 9 Summary and conclusion

Essentially, this in-depth cross-national exploration of factors affecting the implementation of discretionary social assistance payments in Britain and the Netherlands has highlighted that broadly similar schemes for meeting the exceptional needs of beneficiaries in both countries serve diverse goals and objectives in their national and local contexts. This chapter summarises the comparative findings, notes the implications of the work for the wider research in which it is situated, and concludes the thesis with some suggestions for further research.

Summary

Primarily, the origins and development of nationally established income maintenance systems have led to those who administer discretionary payments being situated in different configurations of social assistance. *Bijzondere Bijstand* in the Netherlands is firmly situated in an 'activity fare' context whilst the Social Fund remains largely separated from 'welfare to work' policy in Britain. The empirical research conducted highlighted the cross-national diversity that followed from this.

Reflecting different traditions of cash and care, and administrative structures of the local/national state in the implementation of policy in this area, empirical observation revealed that the two sets of workers were recruited into their respective organisations from quite different educational and occupational backgrounds. From a comparative perspective, such backgrounds would be expected to give the two sets of workers different labour market positions and

thus were associated with the degree to which routes to employment were perceived as being the outcome of choice. Both sets of workers regarded their locales as stigmatised. However, Dutch administrators with a professional qualification congruent to 'people changing' (for example, an HBO in social and legal studies or a teaching or social work qualification) actively chose their employment positions, whilst the (great majority of) their British counterparts spoke of 'ending up' in the Social Fund section. Having applied for what they perceived to be a secure job in the Civil Service, none of the British administrators had wanted to work in a local benefits office. These findings question Lipsky's (1980) assertion, or perhaps his assumption, that street level bureaucrats seek out their helping professions in order to perform a worthwhile role in society. The empirical analysis suggests that the backgrounds of the workers affected the degree to which they were motivated to apply for their employment positions in order to 'help people' or to secure themselves a 'good job'. Such differences might essentially have implications for their understandings of claimants.

Specifically, different backgrounds affect perceptions about 'the poor' and poverty that the two sets of workers develop during their careers. Merged with their respective 'paternalist' and 'managerial' organisational contexts and constraints (outlined in chapter 6), such understandings affected their frame of reference for awarding payments and the extent to which staff thought they could, or could not, 'help people'.

Organisational contexts generated conflicting goals for administrators. Specifically, the Dutch workers perceived themselves as having to meet

exceptional need whilst needing to activate beneficiaries, whilst Social Fund Officers struggled to meet exceptional need in the context of limited budgets and tight targets for clearing work.

Such conflicting goals were relatively easier to overcome for the Dutch administrators. In line with their professional qualifications, the Dutch workers in their 'activity fare' context operated with quite sophisticated understandings of the dynamics of new or modern poverty and were mostly able to use *Bijzondere Bijstand* as a tool of implementation; to paternalistically affect the behaviour of social assistance beneficiaries and to try to facilitate paths out of social assistance. Because of their tight directions, targets for clearing work and inadequate budgets, British administrators conversely, perceived that they were prevented from helping those they considered as displaying some degree of responsible behaviour. Staff were thus constrained to operate a safety net for the most vulnerable with discretionary payments, rather than activating social assistance beneficiaries. Along with their educational and occupational backgrounds, these organisational constraints led to a concern with deterring long-term social assistance beneficiaries, informally labelled as 'the regulars', who staff perceived as intent on subsidising their general (and often, but not always, low) benefit levels.

Configurations of social assistance therefore affected the degree to which administrators exerted social control over beneficiaries, but not the meanings they associated to the forms of discretionary payments: loans and grants, at their disposal. Similar 'moral codes' that administrators shared however filtered through, and were often compounded by diverse contexts and

constraints. Thus non-repayable grants were used in the Dutch 'activity fare' context as a reward for, or incentive to, 'good' (reciprocal and responsible) behaviour. In Britain grants were ideally awarded to those impotent and 'non-regular' customers. Loans, which by their nature entail a degree of reciprocity, were perceived as punishments to chastise or enforce a less eligibility status on irresponsible undeserving applicants. The Dutch administrators awarded loans to affect and chastise the behaviour of those suspected of fraud, those who would not work and, where their irresponsible consumption patterns warranted, those who could not work. Where possible, British officers sought to enforce a less eligibility status on those they considered did not want to work but were also constrained to award loans to those they perceived as deserving.

These institutional contexts also implied differences in the degree to which both sets of workers administered exceptional provision along the continuum of absolute and relative notions of human need and poverty. As chapter 8 illustrated, in order to administer a safety net provision, Social Fund staff attempted to separate their social and sometimes even their basic human needs from those of their customers. Dutch administrators, on the other hand, were shown to be more able to take the relative social position of the applicant into account and to give them what they perceived they deserved according to their merit (Ignatieff 1984).

Notwithstanding this difference however, it was highlighted that in the discretionary payment schemes under study, administrators operated with a mega conception of need that contained conflicting elements rather than a

fixed or universal notion. Unlike social theorists, administrators did not consider the abstract needs of 'strangers' (Ignatieff 1984). Rather, they constructed need and wants in accordance with such typifications of applicants as 'motivated' or 'genuine'. Issues of control and responsibility as criteria of desert were paramount and often superseded those associated with, for example, 'existence of children'.

Ultimately, and regardless of the relative generosity of benefit levels in each country, the construction of need and want was underpinned by an administrative connection between production and consumption. Administrators perceived that social assistance beneficiaries, by definition inadequate producers, had a responsibility to live within their means and to manage on what they got. The comparison of administrative techniques thus illustrated that administrators sought to constrain the 'irresponsible' lifestyle and consumption choices of social assistance beneficiaries in an absolute sense. Cross nationally this suggests that 'there is an irreducible absolutist core in the idea of poverty' (Sen 1983:159) in administrative frames of reference.

Implications

The findings of this study allow comments on the interrelation between regime theory and typologies of social assistance. As seen, recent in-depth work in this area (Lødemel 1997) highlighted a welfare paradox, in that social assistance provision in the social democratic Norwegian welfare state was more 'liberal' and bore a greater resemblance to its Poor Law predecessor than did its British counterpart. This was explained by the different historical

origins of cash/care and central/local social assistance regimes in Britain and Norway and their interrelationship with social insurance.

Given the nature of Lødemel's research, he acknowledges that he was less able to comment on the degree to which approaching the respective social assistance locales for help was perceived as stigmatising for clients (1997:269). The present research findings can not answer this question, but can perhaps forward some comment. Local offices in both the Netherlands and Britain were perceived by staff to be stigmatised. The (perceived) reasons for this tie in with Lødemel's (1997) argument to some degree. In the Netherlands the *Sociale Dienst* is perceived as stigmatised because of the divisions within public welfare, the explicit separation between social assistance and social insurance provision. The municipality is the provider of 'last resort' income maintenance and the clientele have less of an attachment to the labour market than social insurance beneficiaries.

In Britain conversely, (indeed, in any liberal regime) it can be argued that the main welfare division is between public and private welfare rather than within public welfare. Thus Lødemel argues that 'there is a much less socially divided public income maintenance in Britain' (Lødemel 1997:257). That may be the case, however this research has highlighted that administrators distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving. What can not be stated with any confidence however is the degree to which customers' (assistance/insurance) benefit receipt rather than their behaviour (long term

receipt of benefits and/or causing disruption and making demands on resources and time) in the offices lead to this differentiation by staff.

Tentatively therefore, it can be suggested that administratively perceived reasons for the stigma at local offices in the UK can partly be seen as the inverse of Lødemel's argument: there is no separation of locale for social assistance and social insurance beneficiaries. Thus at least some of the 'regulars' i.e. long-term social assistance beneficiaries make 'the social' 'not a very nice place to come to' (for example, for pensioners, those signing sick for the first time, those perceived as wanting to work, and perhaps the generally well behaved long term beneficiaries).

The findings also highlight some further paradoxes in exceptional need provision within social assistance in the two welfare regimes. It can be suggested, for example, that there is more scope for equity – at least in the nature of the needs that can be met - in Britain's liberal exceptional payment scheme where (primarily) the budget restricts the basic needs of the able-bodied applicant to those associated with sleeping and eating (for discretionary Crisis Loan and Community Care Grants at least). In the Netherlands conversely, the absence of budgetary constraints left more room to administer provision according to the relative social position of the applicant in question, which thus meant inequity in the nature of the needs that could be met.

A further paradox emerges if we consider perceptions for the causes of poverty in the two countries. Social democratic regimes, as argued in chapter

2, operate more in accordance with assumptions of 'structural' causes of poverty, and indeed recourse was made by administrators to the dynamics of poverty in the Netherlands. Theory posits that liberal welfare regimes operate more with behavioural understandings of the causes of poverty. Yet, this research has demonstrated that in exceptional need provision, the configurations of social assistance deem that administrative practises are, again, almost the inverse. Whilst provision may be more generous in the Netherlands, implementation practises seek to tightly control the poor. The Dutch 'caring state' thus offers social protection for assistance beneficiaries perhaps on the basis that they 'do what they are told'. By contrast, while officers in Britain often had to refuse applications because of lack of funds, they did feel constrained in 'what they could say' to customers both by welfare rights' organisations and the Independent Review Service for the Social Fund. Britain thus provides more (formal) liberty for beneficiaries but less provision. Again, this can be related to and explained by the historical traditions of the relationship between cash and care provision.

There is perhaps more political acceptance of the tight and explicit control of the behaviour of *Sociale Dienst* clients than in the British centralised system, where social assistance was intended, at least in the short term, for more than the residuum (Lødemel 1997). Of course, any such differences may even themselves out if the Social Fund, in the extension of Jobcentre Plus offices, were to be incorporated into the administration of welfare to work in Britain. However, it still begs the question of the political acceptance of a customer, say requesting a washing machine being asked to sign a contract promising to find a job in return for it.

In part, the exploration of discretionary decision making on the exceptional needs of social assistance beneficiaries in both countries under study has provided a window through which the welfare values of those who administer provision may be observed.

In the case of Britain, whilst the administrative notions of 'less eligibility' were strong (and perhaps related as much to the structure of the (low paid) labour market in Britain as the benefit system) administrators considered that it was unjust that 'genuine' or responsible people i.e. those not most in need, 'got nothing' from the system. In part, this is where their disdain for the 'regulars' comes from. Clientele that they have little control over 'hoard' the limited resources and thus are perceived as taking money away from the 'genuine people'. The major point to make here is that such findings primarily question whether those administering income maintenance in Britain believe that provision should be liberal in any normative sense.

What these findings can be said to highlight is the importance of organisational contexts and controls on administrative behaviour. From a comparative perspective, Social Fund staff seemed more constrained than their Dutch counterparts to administer a system that was not in accordance with their values. Cross-national differences show that institutional settings are important for structuring and controlling administrative behaviour and outcomes, but not necessarily values.

Suggestions for further research

This research has begun to explore the nature of exceptional need payments in different configurations of social assistance. In the context of different tiers of government responsibility for the implementation of discretionary payments within social assistance, a potentially interesting comparative analysis would be how, or if, higher-level policy makers feed the views and experience of street-level staff into policy formulation. For example, local policy makers in the Netherlands were often situated in the same building as administrators and staff often talked about 'going upstairs' to ask them questions. In Britain conversely, staff seemed much more isolated from 'those at the top' and referred to them in such terms as 'suits behind a desk in Westminster'. Such systems, and the lines of communication they engender, might essentially be expected to have an effect on the success of policy.

Similarly, building on the findings from this research that question Lipsky's assertions, a potentially fruitful and larger scale comparison might be made of the motivations to welfare state employment, and the degree to which administrators seek out their helping positions.

Given that one of the interesting findings to emerge from the research was the cultural and political acceptance of administrators explicitly controlling the behaviour of social assistance beneficiaries in the two systems a comparison of the aims and history of welfare rights organisations in both countries might further provide an insight into this divergence. Further, there is scope for comparing both how social assistance beneficiaries in (perhaps a number of

different systems) meet their exceptional needs in practise, and the perceptions of those on the receiving end of such decisions thus considering the impact of the different systems on those who rely on them. Research could also take forward the initial findings of 'stigmatised' locales in both countries, or indeed in countries with differing degrees of centralisation (e.g., the UK, the Netherlands and Norway) to explore the claimants' perspectives of accessing welfare in different configurations of social assistance.

Bibliography

Abrahamson, P. (1999) The Welfare Modelling Business. *Social Policy and Administration*. Vol. 33, No 4, December 1999, pp 394-415.

Adler, M. and Asquith, S. (1981) *Discretion and Welfare*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Adler, M. and Asquith, S. (1981) 'Discretion and Power'. In Adler, M. and Asquith, S. (1981) *Discretion and Welfare*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Alcock, P. (1997) *Understanding Poverty*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

Anderson, D. (1991) *The Unmentionable Face of Poverty in the Nineties: Domestic incompetence, improvidence and male irresponsibility in low-income families*. London: Social Affairs Unit.

Aust, A. and Arriba, A. (2004) 'Paradigms and social assistance reforms in Europe in the 1990s'. *Paper prepared for the Welfare Reform and Management of Societal Change (WRAMSOC) workshop in Berlin, 23-24 April, 2004.*

Baldwin, R. (1997) 'Rules, discretion and legitimacy'. In Hill, M. (ed) (1997) *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Barter, C. and Renold, E. (1999) 'The use of vignettes in qualitative research'.
Social Research Update 25. <http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU25.html>

Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, consumerism and the new poor*. Buckingham,
Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Baumgartner, M.P. (1992) 'The Myth of Discretion' in Hawkins, K. (1992) (ed.)
The Uses of Discretion. Oxford socio-legal studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Becker, U. (2000) 'Welfare state development and employment in the
Netherlands in comparative perspective'. In *Journal of European Social
Policy*, Vol. 10 (3) pp219-239.

Berthoud, R. and Dalley, G. (1992) *Challenging Discretion: the Social Fund
Review Procedure*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Bradshaw, J. (1981) 'From Discretion to Rules: the Experience of the Family
Fund.' In Adler, M. and Asquith, S. (1981) *Discretion and Welfare*. London:
Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Bradshaw, J. (1972) The concept of social need. In *New Society*, 30th March
1972, pp. 640 –643.

Buck, T. and Smith, R. (2003) 'Introduction' in Buck, T. and Smith, R. (2003) *Poor Relief or Poor Deal? The social fund, safety nets and social security*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Burgess, R.G. (1991) *In the Field: an Introduction to Field Research*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bulmer, M. (Ed.) (1982) *Social Research Ethics* London; MacMillan.

Castles, F.G. and Mitchell, D. (1993) *Worlds of Welfare and Families of Nations in Castles, F.G (ed.) (1993) Families of Nations: Patterns of Public Policy in Western Democracies*. Dartmouth: Aldershot.

Clark, P.B. and Wilson, J.Q. (1961) 'Incentive Systems: a Theory of Organisations', in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol.6, part 2, pp 129-166.

Clarke, J. and Newman, J. (1997) *The Managerial State*. London: Sage Publications.

Clasen, J. (2003) 'Comparative Social Policy and the European Union' in Baldock, B., Manning, N. and Vickerstaff, S. (Eds.) (2003) *Social Policy*, Oxford:Oxford University Press.

Clasen, J. (1999) 'Introduction' in Clasen, J. (1999) (Ed.) *Comparative Social Policy. Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Clasen, J. (1994) *Paying the Jobless. A comparison of unemployment benefit policies in Great Britain and Germany*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Cook, F. (1989) *Rich law, Poor law. Different Responses to Tax and Supplementary Benefit Fraud*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Cook, F. (1979) *Who should be helped? Public support for social services*. California: Sage Publications.

Craig, G. (1992) *Replacing the Social Fund. A Strategy for Change*. Social Policy Research Unit. York: University of York.

Craig, G. (2003) 'Lump Sum and Emergency Payments: A Brief History' in Buck, T. and Smith, R. (2003) *Poor Relief or Poor Deal? The social fund, safety nets and social security*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Cronin, A. (2001) 'Focus Groups' in Gilbert, N. (2001) *Researching Social Life*. London: Sage.

Dageling, P. and Colebatch, H. (1997) 'Structure and action as constructs in the practise of public administration'. In Hill, M. (1997) (ed) *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Davidson, J. (2003) *Safety Nets and Trampolines: The Implementation of Exceptional Need Provision in Britain and the Netherlands*. In Buck, T. and Smith, R. (Eds.) (2003) *Poor Relief or Poor Deal? The social fund, safety nets and social security*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Dean, H. (1991) *Social Security and Social Control*. London: Routledge.

De Swaan, A. (1988) *In Care of the State: health care, education and welfare in Europe and the USA in the modern era*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Ditch, J. (1999) 'A Second Coming for Social Assistance?' In Clasen, J. (ed.) (1999) *Comparative Social Policy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Ditch, J. (1995) 'Comparing discretionary payments within social assistance schemes' in Guillemard, A.M., Lewis, J. Ringen, S. and Salais, R. (eds.) 1995 *Comparing Social Welfare Systems in Europe*. Vol. 1, pp.337-367. Paris: Oxford Conference Mission Recherche et Experimentation.

Ditch, J. Bradshaw, J., Clasen, J., Huby, M. and Moodie (1997) *Comparative Social Assistance, Localisation and discretion*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Ditch, J. and Oldfield, N. (1999) 'Social assistance: recent trends and themes' in *Journal of European Social policy* Vol.1, no 1. pp.65-76.

Dogan, M. (2002) Strategies in Comparative Sociology in *Comparative Sociology*, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp 63-92.

Dogan, M. and Pelassy, D. (1990) *How to compare nations. Strategies in comparative politics*. New Jersey: Chatham House publishers.

Doyal, L. and Gough, I. (1991) *A theory of human need*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Duke, K. (2002) Getting Beyond the 'Official Line': Reflections on Dilemmas of Access, Knowledge and Power in Researching Policy Networks, in *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 31, no 1, pp 39-59.

Eardley, T., Bradshaw, J., Ditch, J., Gough, I. and Whiteford, P. (1996a) *Social Assistance in OECD Countries: Synthesis Report*. Department of Social Security Research Reports no 46. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Eardley, T., Bradshaw, J., Ditch, J., Gough, I and Whiteford, P. (1996b) *Social Assistance in OECD Countries: Country Reports*. Department of Social Security Research Reports no 47. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Ebbinghaus, B (2003) 'How the Cases You Choose Limit the Questions You Ask: Selection Problems in Comparative Research Designs'. *European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Conference*, Marburg, September 18-21, 2003.

Elmore, R. (1997) Organisational models of social program implementation. In Hill, M. (1997) (ed) *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Elmore, R.F. (1978) 'Organisational Models of Social program Implementation'. *Public Policy*. Vol. 26 no2, Spring 1978. pp185-228.

Emerson, R.M. and Paley, B. (1992) 'Organisational Horizons and Complaint-Filing' in Hawkins, K. (1992) (ed.) *The Uses of Discretion*. Oxford socio-legal studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Engbersen, G. (1989) 'Cultures of long term unemployment in the new West'. *The Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences*, vol.25. no 2 October 1989, pp 75-96.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1999) *Social Foundations of Postindustrial economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (2000) 'The Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' in Pierson, C. and Castles, F.G. (Eds.) *The Welfare State Reader*. Cambridge: The Policy Press.

Evans, M. (1998) 'Social Security': Dismantling the Pyramids?' in Glennerster, H. and Hills, J. (1998) *The State of Welfare. The Economics of Social Spending*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feldman, M. (1992) 'Social Limits to Discretion: An Organisational Perspective'. In Hawkins, K. (1992) (ed.) *The Uses of Discretion*. Oxford socio-legal studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fielding, N. (1993) Qualitative Researching in Gilbert, N. (Ed) (1993) *Researching Social Life*, London: Sage, pp. 135-153.

Finch, J. (1987) 'Research note – The vignette technique in survey research'. *Sociology* Vol.21 no. 1. pp 105-114. February 1987.

Fincham, R. and Rhodes, P.S. *The individual, work and organization. Behavioural studies for business and management*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fitzpatrick, T. (2003) 'Cash Transfers' in Baldock, B., Manning, N. and Vickerstaff, S. (Eds.) (2003) *Social Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fletcher, D. R. (1997) Evaluating special measures for the unemployed. Some reflections on the UK experience. *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 25, no 2, pp. 173-184.

Fraser, N. (1989) *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Giddens, A. (1999) 'Why the old Left is wrong on poverty' in *New Statesman*. 25th October, 1999.

Goodin, R. E. (2002) 'Structures of Mutual Obligation' in *Journal of social Policy*, Vol. 31, no.4, pp 579-596.

Goodin, R.E., Headey, B., Muffels, R. and Dirven, H. (1999) *The Real Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Golding and Middleton (1982) *Images of welfare: press and public attitudes to poverty*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Goldstone, J.A. (1997) 'Methodological Issues in Comparative Macrosociology', in *Comparative Social Research*, Volume 16, pp 107-120.

Goldthorpe, J. H. (1997) Current Issues in Comparative Macrosociology: a response to the commentaries, in *Comparative Social Research*, Volume 16, pp 121-132.

Gouldner, A.W. 'The norm of reciprocity: a preliminary statement', in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, no 2, pp 161-178.

Gough, I. (1998) 'Social Assistance in OECD Countries'. *Paper presented in Florence, European University Institute, European forum*. December 11-12th 1998.

Hall, P.A. and Taylor, R.C.R. (1996) 'Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms'. *Political Studies* XLIV, pp. 936-957.

Ham, C. and Hill, M. (1993) *The Policy Process in the Modern Capitalist State*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Handler, J. (1979) *Protecting the Social Service Client*. Institute for research on poverty. London: Academic Press.

Handler, J.F. and Hasenfeld, Y. (1991) *The moral construction of poverty. Welfare reform in America*. California: Sage.

Handler and Hollingsworth (1971) *The deserving poor'. A study of welfare administration*. Institute for research on poverty monograph series. New York/ London: Academic Press.

Hantrais, L. and Mangen, S. (1996) 'Method and management of cross-national social research' in Hantrais, L. and Mangen, S. (1996) (eds.) *Cross-national research in the social sciences*. London: Pinter.

Hasenfeld, Y. (1972) People Processing Organisations: an Exchange Approach. In *American Sociological Review*, 1972, Vol.37. June 1972, pp256-263.

Hasenfeld, Y. and Weaver, D. (1996) 'Enforcement, Compliance, and Disputes in Welfare-to-Work Programs' in *Social Services Review*. June 1996. pp. 235-256.

Hawkins, K. (1992) (ed.) *The Uses of Discretion*. Oxford socio-legal studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hawkins, K. (1992) 'The Use of Legal Discretion: Perspectives from Law and Social Science'. In Hawkins, K. (1992) (ed.) *The Uses of Discretion*. Oxford socio-legal studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Heclo, H. (1974) *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Heikkilä, M. and Keskitalo, E. (Eds.) (2001) *Social assistance in Europe. A comparative study on minimum income in seven European countries*. Finland: National research and development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES).

Hemerijck, A., Unger, B and Visser, J. (2000) 'How Small Countries Negotiate Change: Twenty-Five Years of Policy Adjustment in Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium, in Scharpf, F.W. and Schmidt, V.A. (Eds) *Welfare and work in*

the open economy. Diverse responses to common challenges. Vol. II. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Higgins, J. (1980) 'Social Control Theories of Social Policy' in *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 9, no1, pp 1-23.

Hill, M. (2000) (book review) I. Lødemel (1997) *The Welfare Paradox, Income Maintenance and personal social Services in Norway and Britain, 1946-1966.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press. In *Journal of Social Policy* vol. 29 no 3.

Hill, M. (1997) *The Policy Process in the Modern State.* Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hill, M. (1969) 'The exercise of discretion in the National Assistance Board', in *Public Administration*, vol.47, pp75-90.

Holsch, K. and Kraus, M. (2004) 'Poverty alleviation and the degree of centralisation in European schemes of social assistance', in *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 14 (2), pp 143-164.

Homan, R. (1991) *The Ethics of Social research* London: Longman

Howe, L.E.A. (1985) 'The 'Deserving and the Undeserving': Practises in an Urban, Local Social Security Office'. *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol.14, no1. pp 49-72.

Huby, M. and Dix, G. (1992) *Evaluating the Social Fund*. Department of Social Security Research Report No. 9. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Ignatieff, M. (1984) *The needs of strangers*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Jentsch, B. (1998) 'The Interpreter Effect': Rendering Interpreters Visible in Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology, *Journal of European Social Policy* Vol. 8, no 4, pp. 275-289.

Johnson, R.B. (1998) Examining the Validity Structure of Qualitative Research. *Education*, Vol. 118. No 2.

Jones, C. (1985) *Patterns of Social Policy. An introduction to Comparative Analysis*. London: Tavistock Publications Limited.

Kasza, G.J. (2002) The Illusion of Welfare 'Regimes' in *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol.31, no 2, pp. 271-287.

Kavanagh, D. (1996) *British Politics. Continuities and Change*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford university Press.

Kennett, P. (2001) *Comparative Social Policy. Theory and Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Kennett, P. and Yeates, N. (2001) 'Defining and constructing the research process' in Kennett, P. (2001) *Comparative Social Policy. Theory and Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Kirk, J. and Miller, M.L. (1986) *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*. California: Sage.

Kleinman, S. and Copp, M. A. (1993) *Emotions and Fieldwork*. London: Sage.

Knegt, R. (1987) 'Rule Application and Substantive Justice: Observations at a Public Assistance Bureau. In the *Netherlands' Journal of Sociology*, Vol.23, no2, pp116-125.

Komter, A.E. (1996) 'Reciprocity As a Principle of Exclusion: Gift Giving in the Netherlands'. In *Sociology*, Vol.30, no2 pp 299-316.

Kuivalainen, S. (1998) *A Comparative study of the social assistance in the united kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Finland*. Department of Social Policy. University of Turku.

Kvist, J. (2004) 'Does EU enlargement start a race to the bottom? Strategic interaction among EU member states in social policy' in *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 14 (3), pp 301-318.

Lee, R.M. (1993) *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.

Lee R. M. (1993) *Dangerous Fieldwork*, London: Sage.

Leibfried, S. (2000) 'Towards a European Welfare State? In Pierson, C. and Castles, F.G. (2000) *The Welfare State Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Leisering, L. and Walker, R. (eds.) (1998) *The Dynamics of Modern Society*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Lewis, J. (1992) Gender and the development of welfare regimes, in *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 2 no 3, pp 159-173.

Ling, T. (1994) 'The new managerialism and social security' in Clarke, J., Cochrane, A. and McLaughlin, E. (1994) *Managing Social Policy*. London: Sage.

Lipsky, M. (1980) *Street-level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lipsky, M. (1981) 'The Welfare State as Workplace'. In *Public Welfare*, Summer 1981, Vol. 39. pp.22-27.

Lively, J. (1983) 'Paternalism' in Griffiths, A.P. (ed.) (1983) *Of Liberty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lødemel, I. (1997) *The Welfare Paradox, Income maintenance and personal social services in Norway and Britain, 1946-1966*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Lødemel, I. (1999) "Convergence and Divergence in European Welfare. The challenge of social exclusion and youth unemployment". In the report "*Towards flexible welfare states: The future of social solidarity in Europe*", Europaprogrammet:Oslo.http://www.europaprogrammet.no/sider/4...inarrapporter/seminar_299/lodemel.html Accessed 02/04/01.

Lødemel, I. and Trickey, H. (2001) (eds.) *An offer you can't refuse: Workfare in International Perspective*. Bristol: The policy press.

Mabbett, D. and Bolderson, H. (1999) Theories and Methods in Comparative Social Policy'. In Clasen, J. (1999) (Ed.) *Comparative Social Policy. Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Mabbett, D. and Bolderson, H. with Hudson, J, Rowe.M, and Spicker, P. (1997) *Delivering Social Security: A Cross-national Study*. Department of

Social Security Research Report no 59. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.

May, T. (2001) *Social Research. Issues, Methods and Process*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

May, T. (1997) *Social Research. Issues, Methods and Process*, (second edition). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mead, L.M. (1997) (ed.) *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute.

Millar, J. (1994) Poor mothers and absent fathers: support for lone parents in comparative perspective. *Paper presented at the annual conference of the Social Policy Association, University of Liverpool, July 1994.*

Millar, J. (2000) *Keeping track of welfare reform. The New Deal programmes*. York: Published by York Publishing Services Limited for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Millar, J. (2003) (Ed.) *Understanding social security. Issues for policy and practice*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment (1990) *Social Security in the Netherlands*. Deventer, Boston: Kluwer Law and Taxation Publishers.

Minogue, M. (1997) Theory and practise in public policy and administration. In Hill, M. (ed) *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Muffels, R. and Dirven, H.J. (1999) *Marketisation of social security in the Netherlands. A review of the Polder route to privatisation of the sickness and disability insurance*. Tilburg Institute for Social Security Research.

Muffels, R. and Fouarge, D. (2000) *Social Exclusion and poverty: Definition, Public Debate and Empirical Evidence in the Netherlands*. Tilburg Institute for Social Security Research.

Muffels, R., Fouarge, D. and Dekker, R. (2000) *Longitudinal poverty and Inequality. A comparative panel study for the Netherlands, Germany and the UK*. Tilburg Institute for Social Security Research.

Nota van Toelichting, (1974) (Stb. 1974 nr. 418) *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederland*.

Nota van Toelichting, (1980) (Stb. 1980 nr. 87) *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederland*.

Nota van Toelichting, (1984) (stb. 1984 nr.268) Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederland.

Nota van Toelichting, (1980) (21 644) Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal.

Øyen, E. (1990) (Ed.) *Comparative methodology: theory and practise in international social research.* London: Sage.

Piven, F.F. and Cloward, R. A. (1971) *Regulating the Poor. The functions of public welfare.* New York: Pantheon books.

Pollit, C. (1997) 'The development of management thought'. In Hill, M. (ed.) *The policy process. A reader.* Essex: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Peters, B.G. (1978) *The politics of bureaucracy. A comparative perspective.* New York: Longman Inc.

Prottas, J.M. (1979) *people-processing. The street-level bureaucrat in public service bureaucracies.* Toronto: Lexington Books.

Punch, M. (1986) *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork.* California: Sage Publications.

Ragin, C. (1997) 'Turning the tables: how case-oriented research challenges variable-oriented research'. In '*Comparative Social Research*', Vol. 16, pp 27-42.

Ragin, C.C. (1994) *Constructing Social Research*, Thousand Oakes: Pine Forge press.

Saraceno, C. (2002) (Ed.) *Social Assistance Dynamics in Europe: National and Local Poverty Regimes*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Sen, A. (1983) Poor, relatively speaking. *Oxford Economic Papers*. Vol. 35, no2. pp153-169.

Shragge, E. (1997) (ed.) *Workfare. Ideology for a New Under-Class*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Sims, D., Fineman, S. and Gabriel, Y. (1993) *Organizing and organizations. An introduction*. Wiltshire: Sage.

Smith, G. (1980) *Social need Policy, practise and research*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Spies, H. and van Berkel, R. (2001) 'Workfare in the Netherlands - young unemployed people and the Jobseeker's Employment Act. In Lodemel, I. and

Trickey, H. (2001) (eds.) *An offer you can't refuse: Workfare in International Perspective*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Stewart, G. and Stewart, J. (1993) 'The Politics of the Social Fund: social Security as an Issue in Central-Local Government *Relations*' *Local Government Studies*, Vol.19, no3. Autumn pp 408-430.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage: California.

Tester, S. (1987) *Social Loans in the Netherlands*. Occasional paper 37. Bucks: Policy Studies Institute.

Third, H. (2000) Researching Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in the Scottish Context, in *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 34, no 4, December, 2000, pp 448-464.

Titmuss, R.M. (1971) 'Welfare "Rights", Law and Discretion', in *Political Quarterly*, Vol.42, no 2, pp113-132.

Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Trickey, H. (2001) 'Comparing Workfare programs – features and implications'. In Lødemel, I. and Trickey, H. (2001) (eds.) *An offer you can't refuse: Workfare in international perspective*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Trickey, H. and Walker, R. (2001) 'Steps to compulsion within British labour market policies' in Lødemel, I. and Trickey, H. (2001) (eds.) *An offer you can't refuse: Workfare in international perspective*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Tullock, G. (1997) 'The economic theory of bureaucracy' in Hill, M. (1997) (ed.) *The Policy Process. A Reader*. Prentice Hemel Hempstead: Hall/ Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Van den Brande, B., van Leeuwen, P. and van der Voort, W. (1994) *Institutional Engineering in the Welfare State: the Dutch Case*. Research programme 'Policy and Governance in Complex Networks'. Working paper number 10. Rotterdam, September 1994.

Van der Veen, R. and Trommel, W. (1998) *The Dutch Miracle. Managed liberalisation of the Dutch welfare state. A review and analysis of the reform of the Dutch social security system 1985-1997*. University Twente, the Netherlands. Faculty of Public Policy and Public Administration.

Van Kersbergen, K. (1997) 'Christian Democracy in the Netherlands and its influence on the Economic and Social Policy' in Lamberts, E. (1997) *Christian*

Democracy in the European Union 1945-1995. Belgium: Leuven University Press.

Van Kersbergen, K and Becker, U. (1988) The Netherlands: A Passive Social Democratic Welfare State in a Christian Democratic Ruled Society. In *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol 17, no 4, pp 477-499. October 1988.

Van Oorschot, W. (1998) *The reconstruction of the Dutch social security system 1980-2000: retrenchment and modernisation*. Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies, Working paper no 3/1998.

Van Oorschot, W. (2000) Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. In *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 28, no 1: pp33-48.

Van Oorschot, W. and Schell, J. (1991) 'Means-testing in Europe: a growing concern? In Adler, M., Bell, C. and Sinfield, A. (eds.) *The Sociology of Social Security*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Van Oorschot, W. and Smolenaars, E. (1993) *Local income assistance policies. The Dutch case and a European impression*. Work and Organization Research Centre paper. 93.07.011/2B.

Veit-Wilson, J. (1998) *Setting Adequacy Standards. How Governments Define Minimum Incomes*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Waine, B. (2000) Managing performance through pay. In Clarke, J., Gewirtz, S. and McLaughlin, E. (2000) *New Managerialism New Welfare?* London: Sage.

Walker, R. Dix, G. and Huby, M. (1991) 'How social fund officers make decisions' in *Social Work and social Welfare Yearbook 3*, 1991.

Walker, C. (1993) *Managing poverty: the limits of social assistance*. London: Routledge.

Weber, M. (1993) 'The bureaucratic machine' in Lemert, C. (ed.) (1993) *Social Theory. The Multicultural and Classical Readings*. Oxford: Westview Press.

Wikeley, N.J., Ogus, A.I. and Barendt, E. (2002) *The Law of social Security*. 5th edition. London: Butterworths.

Williams, C.C. (2002) 'Social Exclusion in a Consumer Society: A Study of Five Rural Communities' in *Social Policy and Society*, Vol. 1, part 3, July 2002, pp203-211.

Winch, P. (1958) *The idea of a social science and its relation to philosophy*. Wiltshire: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Wright, S. (2003) 'The street-level implementation of unemployment policy', in Millar, J. (2003) (Ed.) *Understanding social security. Issues for policy and practice*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Young, K. (1981) 'Discretion as an implementation problem: a framework for analysis' in Adler, M. and Asquith, S. (eds.) (1981) *Discretion and Welfare*. London: Heimmermann Educational Books.

Appendices

Participants' job description and gender

Britain:

	Male	Female
Local office 1		
Social Fund Manager		1
Social Fund decision-makers (officers)	3	3
Administrative officers		1
Administrative assistants		1
Customer-service manager		1 (former social fund staff)
Counter staff		2 (both former social fund staff)
Local office 2		
Social Fund decision-makers		2
Local office 3		
Social Fund decision-makers		2

The Netherlands:

	Male	Female
Representative of the VNG	1	
Municipal office 1		
Local policy makers	1	1
Head of municipal administration	1	
Consulents	3	4
Supervisory decision-makers	2	2
Case-managers		5
Municipal office 2		
Local policy makers	1	1
Head of administration		1
Consulents (income)		6

Draft interview schedule

1. (This will be used in part as a warm up question) what led to your employment in this position?

Prompts:

What did you do before, how did you get into this job?

2. How do you describe to friends and family what you do for a living?

Prompts:

What do you say to your friends and family that you do in your job; what do you say you do in your work?

(Use below as a check-list. At the end of the interview schedule you can use them to mop up what has not been addressed. Follow them up if not talked about. E.g., you haven't really talked about fraud prevention, is that something that you have to think about?)

- Deal with claimants/applicants or completed application forms.
- Meeting peoples' needs: everyday need/all financial needs of applicants, only exceptional need.
- Making decisions: on discretionary payments/ deciding on priority of need/ whether the applicant has applied for the correct category of payment (e.g. loan or a grant).

- Fraud detection/prevention.
- Getting people back to work/ try and get people back to work/ motivating claimants/ keeping people out of care.

3. What kinds of responses do you get from them?

4. How are applications/cases for exceptional need allocated to you to make a decision on?

Prompts:

By postal area.; Allocated on a random basis as they come into the office; By casework load (e.g. where the administrator may be responsible for a set number of clients).

5. Do you meet face to face with applicants?

6. How familiar are you with your clients?

7. How does this help you make your decision?

8. Are these procedures enough/sufficient for you to base your decision on?

9. Do you have a list of needs for one-off payments that you refer to?

10. Are they prioritised?

11. How often do you refer to them?

12. How difficult is it to stick to the rules – how do you manage that- can you give me an example?

13. What/who do you consult in the office, to help you make a discretionary decision?

Prompts:

The manual/ list/directives/written guidelines; Personal judgement/discretion; Training; Colleagues; other sources.

14. Do you often require information from other sources/agencies?

15. How much of your work is done for you by the computer system?

16. Is this helpful to you?

Prompts:

To ascertain claimant's history/eligibility/work status/ (in the Netherlands phase 1234 status); To make the decision for you.

17. Do you/how do you know when the budget is nearing its limit?

18. Do you have a set limit as to what you as an administrator can spend or is it held centrally somewhere for you to look up?

19. What happens if someone is a high priority and the budget is nearing an end, or empty?

20. Has that ever happened to you?

21. What does the training for your job entail/do you have any professional qualifications?

Prompts:

Classroom based induction; Shadowing others/on the job training.

22. Is this training adequate?

Case Scenarios

1. Male applicant is 26 years old. He has been unemployed for four years. He requests a payment for travelling expenses, a new pair of shoes and a suit to attend interviews for employment.
2. Female applicant (57) and her husband (61) have been claiming social assistance for 19 years. The couple have severe health problems and are unable to work. They have two teenage daughters (14 and 17) the youngest of whom has an eating disorder. The family is currently involved with social work agencies. Female applicant makes an application for three new beds (due to her sudden and severe problems with incontinence) and a cooker which recently blew up.
3. Male applicant is 42 years old. He and his wife have three children (aged 5, 2 and 6 months). They have been unemployed for eight years. The family has recently been re-housed by the local authority, as they needed an extra bedroom. Male applicant requests a payment for a new cot for the baby, a carpet for the extra bedroom and a new pram.
4. Female applicant is 27 years old and has two children aged 8 and 12. Six months ago she left her violent partner to live in a woman's refuge with the children, during which time she has been claiming social assistance. She is now in the process of setting up home with the children. She requests a payment for a washing machine and a cooker, stating that her ex-partner has sold those items previously owned by her.