

**"Opticians and Competition"**

**Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received on the report on "Opticians and Competition" by the Office of Fair Trading.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** We have received a number of representations from organisations representing consumers, organisations representing opticians, the medical profession and members of the public. Some favour the Office of Fair Trading's conclusions, other do not.

**Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now announce the Government's views on proposals from the General Optical Council in response to the report by the Office of Fair Trading on "Opticians and Competition"; and whether he will make a statement.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the proposed revised rules on publicity which the General Optical Council (GOC) sent to the Privy Council Office for preliminary comment. The Privy Council Office has advised the GOC of the Government's view that the proposed new rules do not provide an adequate response to the comments on these matters contained in the Office of Fair Trading report. The Government are now considering what further steps may be necessary.

**Junior Doctors**

**Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether National Health Service consultants are required or recommended to remunerate junior doctors who perform work for them on private in-patients.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** No. The charges paid by a private patient to a health authority for the use of NHS facilities include care provided by junior medical and dental staff.

**Somerset House (Computerised Records)**

**Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to introduce computer technology for the modernisation of the records system at Somerset House; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr. John Patten:** A study into extending the application of computer technology to the preparation of the indexes displayed in the Public Search Room at St. Catherine's House is currently being undertaken by the General Register Office.

**Overseas Group (Correspondence)**

**Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what acknowledgement is issued for the receipt of written inquiries by his Department's overseas group in Newcastle.

**Dr. Boyson:** The procedure followed by our overseas branch is to send an acknowledgement in the form of a printed postcard on the seventh working day after receipt of the correspondence, unless a reply has already been prepared and will be sent shortly. However, an acknowledgement may be sent at once if it is clear to the staff dealing with the correspondence that a final reply cannot be prepared within seven days.

**Blood Products (Imports)**

**Mrs. Currie** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice has been given to hospitals concerning the use of imported factor VIII in the light of recent concern about its possible contamination with the causative agent of acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** There is no conclusive evidence that acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is transmitted by blood products. The use of factor VIII concentrates is confined almost exclusively to designated haemophilia centres whose directors and staff are expert in this field. Professional advice has been made available to all such centres in relation to the possible risks of AIDS from this material.

**Supplementary Benefit**

**Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which index is now used for uprating supplementary benefit.

**Dr. Boyson:** The retail price index with housing costs excluded is being used this year, as it was in 1982.

**Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children were living in families below the supplementary benefit level, on supplementary benefit and with incomes up to 40 per cent. above supplementary benefit level, classified by employment status and whether there were one or two parents, for 1981 on (a) the latest basis and (b) on a basis comparable to 1979.

**Dr. Boyson:** The figures are not readily available but I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

**Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many staff were employed in local offices on supplementary benefit claims at the latest date available.

**Mr. Newton:** It is not possible to give a separate figure for staff employed exclusively on claims work. However, on 1 November 1983, 35,764 staff were employed in the Department's local offices to deal with all aspects of supplementary benefit work.

**Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* estimated figures for the take-up of supplementary benefit for the most recent year for which figures are available on the same basis as the figures supplied for 1977 and 1979 in the Answer on 5 April 1982, *Official Report*, c. 247-250.

**Dr. Boyson:** I am not yet in a position to do so, but hope to be very shortly.

**Mr. Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, if he will estimate how many persons of pensionable age but below 70 years who are not disabled would be floated off supplementary benefit if their eligibility for heating additions on grounds of partial heating were removed; what would be the average loss involved; and what would be the total saving to the Exchequer.

**Dr. Boyson:** No statistics are recorded on the number of supplementary benefit claimants who pay a fixed charge to their landlords for heating, nor on the proportion of such