

Voices

of the Victims

Where the Tax Credit system has gone wrong. A series of case studies in the victims own words, prepared by the Tax Credit Casualties



Tax Credit Casualties

The Tax Credit Casualties (TCC) are an independent organisation run by and for victims of tax credit overpayments and subsequent unfair recovery.

Established in 2005 our objectives are:

An immediate, national amnesty for all cases involving Tax Credit Office error and flaws, independently judged.

An immediate, radical overhaul of the tax credit system, involving full consultation with claimants, and transparency.

A fast-track compensation system to be set up enabling tax credit casualties to receive basic, consolatory payments for distress and harm caused, with the option of claimants in exceptional distress claiming additional payments: independent adjudicators to decide this.

A Judicial Review of the Tax Credit system, in court, of where responsibility lies, to set legal sanctions and standards.

To raise awareness of system-sanctioned abuse and overcome it.

What we do:

Offer support to people receiving overpayment demands, to enable them to know their rights and dispute automatic recovery.

Make representations to leading members of the Government, including Gordon Brown, Alistair Darling, and Jane Kennedy (Financial Secretary to the Treasury).

Campaign and lobby MPs from all political parties to support a full write-off of all non-fraudulent overpayments. (Please see EDM 545 and 818). The TCC will also present Motion 100 at UNISON's National Delegate Conference at Bournemouth advocating the write-off and full reform of the tax credit system.

Make representation to senior civil servants at HMRC.

Research many interrelated issues including evidence of malpractice by HMRC who have continually failed to meet the Ombudsman's Standards for a quality service.

The TCC are forging links with other charities and welfare organisations with similar aims, especially Contact a Family, Single Parents Action Network Families, Need Fathers, AdviceNI and the Child Poverty Action Group.

The TCC has an information-packed website at www.taxcc.org and a lively forum at <http://familytaxcredit.forumco.com>. As well as providing emotional support and information, TCC deals with hundreds of individual cases and has a Child Poverty Action Group trained overpayment case worker providing free advice to members.

Find out more at our website: www.taxcc.org



Voices of the Victims

In the last financial year nearly 6.5 million families in the UK claimed tax Credits. Poor administration of this overcomplicated system led to nearly two million families being overpaid, whilst nearly 900,000 were underpaid thereby not getting the help they are entitled to.

The Tax Credit system has been criticised by many leading politicians from across the political spectrum, including David Blunket, George Osborne and Frank Field, the latter who described Tax Credits as, "the bluntest of anti-poverty weapons and are the equivalent of attempting delicate key hole surgery with a hacksaw."

Along with leading politicians the head of the National Audit Office, Sir John Bourn, has also criticised the Tax Credit system saying, "The thing about tax credits, and I find this just incredible, is the failure of imagination and of sociological competence. A scheme has been designed in which we overpay a lot of poor people, who often have trouble-managing money. So when we later demand repayment, that causes a great deal of anguish."

"...the bluntest of anti-poverty weapons and are the equivalent of attempting delicate key hole surgery with a hacksaw."

Frank Field MP

The Tax Credit Casualties (TCC) have produced this booklet to highlight, through this small sample of stories, the massive scale of the problem, and the human costs. With up to 2 million claimants each year overpaid, these stories are just a glimpse of the misery caused. They are those we have permission to share - the tip of an immense and treacherous iceberg.



Our team is continually hearing harrowing tales, whether talking to desperate, suicidal people, whose first indication that anything is wrong is a letter threatening court action, or listening to people for whom Tax Credit recovery is the last straw, as they struggle with bereavement or terminal illness. It is a sad indictment of those running and defending this system from its innumerable critics that victims must publicly expose their wounds before the extent of their suffering is heeded.

This highlights the huge amount of emotional and psychological damage that this system is having on people, often leading to serious health problems and marriage breakdown.

People that work within the system often complain about the impossibility of managing peoples cases, and as these few examples will show, the result of poor case management and admin.

The cost of this poor management combined with the human cost to the victims of the system cannot be ignored. All political parties must work to finding a solution to both the current and growing victims of the system, and tackle the poor administration which create more on a daily basis.

Paula Dean, Leader of the Tax Credit Casualties, Rotherham:

On being a Tax Credit Casualty

More and more lose control of their lives and livelihoods to HMRC. You're suddenly in debt, payments are abruptly stopped, you don't get told your rights, even the Tax Credit office can't tell you what happened, you feel responsible for affecting your family, you have to find paperwork from 3 years ago, you end up instructing HMRC staff as to their jobs, you have to learn tax law, and have to persuade your MP to pay some attention. You spend hours trying to trace what happened and piecing dispute letters together, losing time with your family. You spend time trying to get someone in Preston to answer the phone and when you do it's never the same person and you have to start your 'story' from the beginning. You lose sleep, take it out on your loved ones and get behind on all the other dramas of daily life.

Working Tax Credits were introduced in 2003 as a key instrument to reduce poverty – one of the Government's priority objectives. This book tells the stories of just some of the people who took up the Government's offer of a 'top up' to their income and believed that it was indeed 'money with their name on it'.

Sadly, this book is not full of happy tales of people who were able to give their children a better quality of life, clear their debts, or finally take their families on holiday. 'Voices of the Victims' gives a small taste of how the system is failing people; where money was accepted in good faith but paid out in error, and recovery has begun. Alarming, a third of claims each year are overpaid: 2 million claimants every year.

"A scheme has been designed in which we overpay a lot of poor people, who often have trouble-managing money. So when we later demand repayment, that causes a great deal of anguish."

Sir John Bourn NAO

Overpayments are an inherent part of the design of the Tax Credit system, and because of that fact they are never going to go away. A very significant number of overpayments also arise and exist because of errors by either HMRC or their systems, and on the rare occasions when HMRC admit fault, the innocent and compliant 'victim' often still has to repay. To rub salt into the wounds of injustice, HMRC camouflage the scale of their guilt by summing together 'fraud and error' figures, indirectly implying that compliant overpayment victims are no better than fraudsters.

There can be no 'acceptable' percentage of claims that are overpaid each year, when each overpayment, at a personal and individual level, increases poverty for the most needy, often destroying peoples' lives. That overpayments exist may now be common knowledge, but less well known is the emotional and psychological impact of learning this money must be returned no matter what: it can, and has, lead to serious health problems and breakdown of relationships.

"Justice is an Amnesty."

"...the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, which is taken up by fewer than a quarter of eligible parents." The Express

Debbie, Enfield:

My payments were stopped by mistake in November '03. Despite various calls and letters to the Tax Credit Office it took over 3 months for the payments to be reinstated. By then I was deep in debt as I am the only wage earner and I can only work part time due to a disability.

In March 04 I received a large lump sum payment, and being careful I called the helpline to check that it was as it should be. I was initially told that there had been a mistake made and that I wasn't entitled to the money, but I was also told in that same call that I should put the money to one side for a few days while the payment reason was checked. I did as I had been asked and then after a few days called them back and was told by two people (one being a supervisor) that the payment was in fact correct and that it was back payment for the time that I hadn't received my payments. I used the money to pay off some of the debts. Some time afterwards (nearly 6 months) I received a demand for repayment for 'overpayment' of nearly £4500!

I queried the demand and was told that I had been paid in error and that I shouldn't have received the amount they had given me. I wrote in and complained and then had a letter back telling me the amount to repay had been written off as it was due to an official error.

Virtually six months after that, I received another demand for payment of the money. This was closely followed by a court summons for non-payment. I have now been to court THREE times and have to go again in April for a final hearing. The first hearing was a disaster as the Tax Credit officers didn't turn up. The second time they turned up but without proper paperwork and the third time the judge decided that he was too confused to make a decision and therefore he placed an order that we have to attend again in April when he has (hopefully) decided that he understands the case!!!! and whether I was entitled to the money or not. If that has got you confused just think how I feel!!!!!!

What I don't understand is that on some of my award letters it shows that the tax credits have clawed back other overpayments without my even knowing that I had been overpaid in the first place, so if they can claw back money from me at any time why did they not do it when they thought that they had overpaid me by nearly £4500???????????

On our second trip to court (Edmonton County Court, N18) the TCO officer produced the dreaded 'Certificate of Debt' but the judge refused to accept it because I had printouts given to me from the TCO stating 'no recovery action to be taken'. Hence our 3rd trip to court and now our fast approaching 4th!!!

It is all DRIVING ME INSANE.....It has cost me lost days wages, wasted annual leave and untold stress to both me and my husband (who should not be subjected to any form of stress as the illness that he suffers from can bring on devastating strokes). So you can imagine how I feel about it all.

"...a totally unacceptable scandal" Shadow Chancellor George Osborne MP

J and C, Monmouthshire:

On the 23rd October 2006, I telephoned the Working Tax Credit (WTC) people to ask for time to check the alleged overpayment demands we had received, and yet again ask them to alter their payments, so the alleged debt would not escalate higher. My husband overheard the telephone conversation:

'We can't stop the payments to you, there's no way we can alter the system. We will recover the overpayment when you stop claiming. The recoverable debt stands at £1,353.18. If you don't pay it, then it will be sorted out in Court and Debt Recovery will be enforced.'

I begged the WTC to reduce the amount they were paying us, but they refused, wrongly blaming us by saying 'you have claimed fraudulently by giving us the wrong figures for 2004 and 2005, so it will be sorted out legally'.

After the telephone call of 23rd October, my husband sat on the garden bench with his head in his hands, while I cried over the alleged debt that we had inadvertently got into.

Since 2004 we had dreaded the large envelopes that contained our award notices.

Each telephone call made to WTC just generated another and another, all varying amounts. How could we check the payments were correct, when we didn't know how WTC calculated them? We had given correct figures, so how could we have got into such debt? Some years earlier we had been persuaded to return to work by the TV hype - '*Money with your name on it*' - during 2003. We had applied to WTC as my husband wanted to rejoin his work colleagues, to become a full member of society, and no longer claim the Incapacity Benefit he had claimed over the previous 12 months. We were told way back in 2003 'WTC is a system set up for people in your circumstances'.

"Since 2004 we had dreaded the large envelopes that contained our award notices."

That fateful October day my husband looked so very ill and had been crying. We had endured worry and stress for too long, and we just couldn't stop the payments from escalating us further into misery. Later that afternoon my husband asked me to drive him to hospital (he was too proud to call an ambulance and didn't want a fuss). As I drove him to our local hospital he had a massive heart attack that rendered him unconscious. He stopped breathing, and this resulted in Anoxia Brain Damage. The tax credit situation was solely responsible for this devastation that has robbed us of my husband, a great father and grandfather. The total amount of alleged debt was £1,353.18p.

Whilst my husband was in the Intensive Treatment Unit I crept away from his bedside to keep an appointment with our MP... He listened to my plight and wrote asking them to disregard the debt on compassionate humanistic grounds. I then had a letter from a Customer Support Manager saying, 'I am sorry to hear about the difficulties, the worries and distress we have caused. I can assure you this was not our intention Having rechecked the amounts we are unable to change our decision and the amount that has to be paid back is £2,748.46.'

In January 2008 we received letters wanting us to pay the alleged debt, otherwise face Court proceedings. So again I contacted our MP begging him to intervene. My husband receives Disability Living Allowance higher rate. I have forgone my career to take care of him at home 24-7. The latest correspondence from WTC says, 'Having looked again at our records the total amount of outstanding overpayments currently show our records £3,757.61. Additionally there is good cause to re-start the 2006.07 award.'

PLEASE for pity's sake NO!!!!

Over the last couple of months I have cried bucketfuls over the demands for overpayments, and the situation that has resulted in my husband's being so very ill. This evening I cried because I found the Tax Credit Casualties' website. I don't feel so despondent any more YOU HAVE GIVEN ME HOPE - IN MY WORLD OF HOPELESSNESS. Thank you.

"...the Public Accounts Committee noted the Revenue had already written off GBP 700million for tax credit recipients and was unlikely to collect a further GBP 1.6billion." The Express

Matthew, South Yorkshire:

Our tax credit overpayment has caused distress to me and my wife. We don't have a lot of spare cash anyway. My wife gave up working full time in March 2006 after suffering depression from work along with being incapacitated through degeneration of the spine and fibromyalgia. She is in constant pain now, despite taking 3 different pain killers each day and has anti-depressants too.

We rely now on her small Incapacity Benefit to basically eat as my salary doesn't leave much left after the rises in fuel, food, petrol and every other thing these days.

HMRC have, in their letters, first said that they did not make a mistake, then said they had a "system error". Also the amounts they claim are overpaid range from £43 to over £2,000.

In March 2005, my wife's payments dropped from over £400 to £70 then again in April to about £50 so, having advised HMRC of our marriage in November 2004, she was expecting the payments to drop at that time so could reasonably expect the amounts to be correct.

Given the timescales of contact from HMRC, their reluctance to reply to letters and the general confusion, I can't see how they can realistically justify this is a valid overpayment. Of course, the fact that they are complete idiots might have something to do with it!!

"We've got to take back the ideal of justice, we've got to take back this principle of human dignity. We've got to take it back from vengeance, from hatred, we've got to say: look, we're all in this together. We are human beings." *David Kaczynski.*

Mary, Suffolk:

From 2003-05, I worked for a company called Shaw Trust, helping disabled people get back to work. As part of this, I had to advise people on the intricacies of the benefits system, including Tax Credits. I must have recommended Tax Credits to fifty clients during my time there. I helped several of them get hold of and fill out the forms.

It made sense to apply for Tax Credits myself, and I received them and all was well. Working and being financially stable had a very positive effect on my illness - indeed, I got to a point where I was about to get in touch and ask for the "disabled" part of my claim to be crossed out.

In spring 2005, I became very sick indeed (with something completely different). I was so busy having ambulances called for me, spending weeks confined to bed, seeing assorted specialists, having my brain scanned, worrying about whether this new illness was temporary, permanent or fatal, that sort of thing, that I barely noticed when my April Tax Credits review resulted in my being told that I had been overpaid by about £10 a week for the previous year, amounting to just in excess of £500, and that this amount would be reclaimed by a reduction in my payments for the next however many weeks. I don't know why or how the overpayment occurred - there was no accusation of fraud or anything, and as you can imagine, the idea of having slightly less money per week simply wasn't a priority at that point. I had slightly more pressing things to worry about.

At the end of June 2005, my work contract expired. Given that I had spent the best part of three months off work, it wasn't a surprise to hear that the contract wouldn't be renewed. I informed Tax Credits on the afternoon of the final day of my contract, and applied for Incapacity Benefit the following morning.

My bill from Tax Credits for £531 arrived before I'd even heard back from the Department of Work and Pensions about whether I was entitled to any money to live off. The next year and a half was a tale of harassment and panic that is probably all too familiar to you.

I am sincerely sorry that I recommended Tax Credits to anyone. I am outright ashamed that I recommended it to people with cognitive difficulties and other individuals who were at a disadvantage when it came to understanding and fighting for their rights. I don't feel any less guilty for the fact that it was my job. I can only hope that none of my clients ended up in the horrible situation I did. I realise this is optimism at the extreme.

In November 2006, a spectacular screw-up. I received two letters from the Tax Credits department. One stated that I owed £531 to be paid by Christmas Eve that year. The other, a "Statement of Account", said "Overpayment of Working Tax Credit in previous years £0.00" and "total tax credits overpaid £0.00". I spent the day on the phone and eventually spoke to someone at the East Kilbride Recovery Office who said that they were running two simultaneous computer systems. One said I owed £531, the other said I owed nothing. She took personal responsibility for finding out which one was right and

said that they would be in touch.

But they didn't get in touch again. I reasoned that if I owed them money, they would have written to me, so I moved on.

In November 2007 - a full year with no communication of any kind from Tax Credits - my health had recovered a bit. I moved in with my boyfriend and got a job again. I work 20 hours a week and I earn £5.60 an hour. I'm also disabled again (just in a different way than I was before), so I think I'm probably entitled to Tax Credits again, but the thought of claiming was enough to make me feel sick, so I'm muddling through without. At present, my boyfriend and I just about break even. We're happy to live with the idea of not going out or having a holiday or anything, if it means we can avoid having to tangle with that mess of a system.

But, January 2008, they wrote to my old address. A neighbour forwarded the letter. It's different to the letters I got before, it's nastier. It threatens legal action and says that interest is accruing daily on my £531 debt until the balance reaches zero.

I am pushed to my physical and mental limit doing my 20 hours a week at work. I know it doesn't sound like much, but when you consider that in 2005 I was confined to bed... My budget is stretched as it is and I can't pay the £40-odd a month they'd like me to. I have neither the cash to pay them nor the capacity to fight them. I love my job, but I increasingly feel like my only choice will be to go back onto Incapacity Benefit so that I have the time and energy to deal with this mess.

“I love my job, but I increasingly feel like my only choice will be to go back onto Incapacity Benefit so that I have the time and energy to deal with this mess.”

I phoned their office and the person I spoke to said she'd send an appeal pack. That was two days ago.

Every person I have spoken to on the phone has behaved admirably. They have been professional and courteous. They have been patient if I have started crying or been suddenly indisposed mid-call due to my illness. They have willingly given their names for me to write down, repeated things back to me until I have felt certain that we are understanding each other, and have even wished me luck. I would never in a million years make a single complaint about the frontline telephone staff I have dealt with.

The problem is the system itself.

"The reputation of HMRC for competence looks increasingly threadbare as revelations of this kind become public." Edward Leigh MP

Simon, Isle of Wight:

We have lived in misery and fear for almost 4 years now due to the complete and utter shambles that is Tax Credits.

In 2003, when money was particularly tight, we were assured by a Tax Credits telephone advisor that we had been 'grossly underpaid' for the past few months of our claim and to expect a large backdated sum - we had 100% given the Tax Credit Office (TCO) correct information re our circumstances at ALL times, but it was constantly input incorrectly or not at all by their poorly trained staff.

Within weeks of us paying off debts with these payments, we received letters from the TCO saying that they wanted the money back. In 2004 we actually received 10 x different Award Notices with different sums on THE SAME DAY, and had sums paid into our bank accounts again; the TCO had the nerve to tell us that they had 'overpaid' us again + that it was our mistake as this time we had missed an error on one of those 10 x Award Notices.

Our Tax Credits were completely stopped so as to claw back the 'overpayments'. Our daughter was 2 years old and the telephone advisor actually chuckled as they told us not to worry as we would start to receive Tax Credits again when she was 9 years old!! We have met with constant obfuscation and delay by HMRC in regard to our case - they do not even reply to letters sent by our local MP now. We have spent many hours trying to get justice in this case + now have a case file that reaches a height of approx 4 inches.

We have appealed to HMRC and been turned down twice and we are now taking our case to The Adjudicator's Office, but don't hold out much hope as we have discovered that this organisation is not independent at all, but actually part of HMRC/Tax Credits!! Now we dread the post arriving every day as we know that very soon it will bring a court summons that will mean that we will somehow have to find over £6,000 to pay back to HMRC.

This money was not fraudulently obtained by us - we were struggling financially and it truly helped us out of a very difficult financial situation - but now we feel that the rug has been well and truly pulled from under us and that we are in a worse position than when we first claimed. Why aren't HMRC pursuing the criminals who have fraudulently obtained millions via Tax Credits? Is it easier to go after the small fish like us perhaps, even if we have done nothing wrong?

We truly wish that we had never believed those TV adverts ('money with your name on it' indeed) + that we had NEVER EVER claimed Tax Credits and just bundled along budgeting as carefully as we could.

"It is embarrassing beyond belief that the Treasury has failed to control fraud and error in a system which Mr Brown introduced." Shadow paymaster general Mark Francois

Chris, Caernarfon:

On 26th October 2006 I received an award of roughly £4000. On 2nd November I telephoned the helpline to query it and was told it was right, to spend it and have a good Christmas. On 26th January 2007 I received a letter stating our circumstances and correct family income and asking if anything had changed. I telephoned the helpline on 2nd February 2007 to advise that my wife had had an increment at work the day before of £800. On 12th February 2007 I received advice of an overpayment of £3500.

I found out that the HMRC software had zeroed my family income (a known software fault) and the award was based on a zero income, but only after 4 calls to HMRC was this admitted on the 4th call. I was advised to Appeal and was sent a booklet and form. I photocopied all my award notices which showed correct income details and explained about the call on 2nd November 2006 in writing. I sent this registered mail and it was received at HMRC Preston on 9th March 2007. I never had any acknowledgement but was told by the helpline it was "in the bin".

I had 3 letters since saying it was not reasonable to believe it was correct, but never addressing the fact that I queried it on 2nd November 2006 with HMRC. I also had requests for returns of WTC overpayments for 2003-4 and 2004-5. Apparently I had not advised HMRC I got divorced on February 2004 and remarried 2005. I phoned the helpline and have since actually spoken to the author of these letters. Apparently, although addressed to me they contain all the personal details of a 3rd party. HMRC confirmed that as I had no award of WTC they would not be seeking recovery of a zero overpayment and that I should just bin and forget the letters. I asked for this in writing and some sort of explanation. I have probably repeated this request 10 times since, verbally and in writing, but never had any reply.

I finally got through on the Director's line and spoke to a David Walker in June after 176 connected calls, to be advised by machine they were too busy and to ring back. He was aware of the software fault and requested I photocopy the award notices and send them to him personally. I explained I had done this at the formal appeal stage and in turn he told me he had absolutely no chance of finding them. I sent the requested information and he telephoned me 2 days later to advise me I could not have known it was an overpayment on the information I was sent and "remitted it". I again asked for this in writing and he told me of a further software fault that stopped him doing this but that they were working on it.

After hundreds of calls to the helpline and Directors line it was remitted verbally, but I have never had this information in writing, nor can I get it apparently. My MP has been told in writing that they will suspend recovery of the overpayment and has given me a copy of this letter. Despite monthly requests they have never communicated this in writing nor explained the wrongly addressed letters. I wonder when they will reactivate recovery as suspension is a temporary state in my dictionary.

My circumstances: My mother and Father died recently in horrific circumstances. My mother had bone cancer and after surgery contracted MRSA, she spent the last 2 weeks

shouting and screaming whenever she was conscious and I watched as the MRSA literally ate her. She died bleeding from her eyes, nose, mouth and ears, and her skin was gone. My Father had diabetic Gangrene and died after 5 amputations in 4 months, he also contracted MRSA and C.Difficle. The hospital could not dress the stumps for some reason so this is what I saw at every visit.

I am unable to sleep still due to flashbacks and nightmares, I was under a Psychiatrist who tried all the drugs available but I suffer from allergies badly and they all had very bad reactions so they were stopped. I was told that I had to deal with this on my own, to go home, avoid any stress and to motivate myself by doing things I like. I have panic attacks in public places and can become aggressive over the smallest thing. I cannot handle any sort of stress and HMRC gave me plenty of it. It has almost caused the break up of my marriage, especially the wrongly addressed letters. My wife thought I was a bigamist. Please don't laugh I am serious. I considered suicide many times since my parent's death but my family keep me here. This could have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

"Tax credits provide support to 6 million families and have been central in lifting 600,000 children out of poverty since 1997. They have also improved work incentives and reduced the tax burden on low to middle income families, so that three million families pay no net tax at all," HMRC 2008

Anne, West Sussex:

I am a widow in despair! I was claiming tax credits until 2007 when my daughter turned 18. However, I've now received two bills for overpayments, one for £280 relating to the year 2003/04 and the other for £736 relating to 06/07. I rang to query the first bill and then was told, to my horror, that there is a third one on the way, of £800 relating to years 05/06.

I can't understand why I was overpaid – they sent a form, I filled it in honestly, they put money in my bank account.

“I'm 56 and can just see myself spending the rest of my working life struggling to pay this back.”

I was bringing up a teenager, of course I was going to spend it. How can they ask for it back when it seems to have been their mistake? I just don't have it. I'm not on a high wage and there's now only me, I don't have a partner with an income to share the household bills.

I'm 56 and can just see myself spending the rest of my working life struggling to pay this back. I'm not sleeping at night with the worry.

“There are plenty of precedents for HMRC to write off amounts owing where it has made errors.” John Andrews, chairman of the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group,

Sara, Birmingham:

I am 24 years old and a single mother to one child aged 6. I have claimed tax credits since my son was one. However at present I am only able to claim Child Tax Credits due to my salary. I have been claiming Tax credits for approximately 5 years. This year I received a letter from the HMRC informing me that I owed them just over £10,000 in overpayments. In sheer panic I immediately rang the tax credit helpline to find out where this figure had derived from. I was informed that this was because they hadn't received my annual review pack (which was sent in). I conducted an over the phone renewal and was told to ignore the demand for payment.

A couple of weeks later I noticed that my payments had stopped and was greeted with yet another demand for £10,000. Again I rang the office to be told that there was some sort of administration error with my account and it was with the team leaders and head office to be reinstated. Needless to say a couple of weeks later I received yet another prompt for payment of the £10,000. Yet again I got in contact with the office to be told to ignore the letter, and that it was an automated process.

Since this time I have had countless phone calls with the tax credit office call desk to be met with these comments:

“We are not able to tell you why your claim has been stopped.”

“We are not able to pass your call to anybody as we don't have any phone numbers, we only use mail” (Are we really in the 21st Century?)

“We have logged your call Miss -. Someone will call you back tomorrow” (Tomorrow never comes.)

When I spoke to one call handler we had a polite argument over the birth date of my son, which they had wrong!! (Do they really have a handle on us?)

“We do not know what the overpayment is for.”

One call at around 6pm was met with “We cannot put you through to the complaints department as they have gone home”. I believed that they were open till 8pm.

I believe from experience that the call desk helpline, as they are so called, have provided me with no help whatsoever and each one that I speak to tells me something different, indicating no continuity and lack of call logging. In frustration and to make sure that I am not going insane I have requested from the data protection office all of my call details which I have had no response from. Considering the amount of calls that I have had with the office, I have had no communication other than three letters asking for payment and one phone call from the debt recovery team.

At the point of desperation and frustration I searched the internet to see if I was the only one experiencing these problems. I was deeply dumbfounded and disturbed by how

many lives had been affected by the HMRC. I also contacted my local MP Lynne Jones who has been very useful in sending a letter to HMRC to see if she can find any resolve. I would like to point that whilst searching the internet I came across a very useful website and forum called the Tax Credit Casualties: www.taxCC.org

This site has provided me with valuable information and given guidance where others have faulted. This site needs escalating out into society so that they can help others in similar situations who are not as confident in speaking out.

Postscript:

The date today is Tuesday 11th December and I have still not received any Child Tax Credits from August and still do not understand why I owe them £10,000. I am worn out with trying to get a response from the Tax Credit Office and with Xmas looming am trying to keep my head above the water.

Additionally this year the HMRC lost my personal details through the child benefit scam, and last week I had to cancel my card as my details are being used in some police investigation and they are not able to give me any further information. Not sure whether it is linked.

Thanks for a Merry Xmas HMRC!

Fraud and error in the benefits system cost the taxpayer £2.7billion last year... official errors accounted for £1billion – Daily Mail May 16 2008

Wilf, Portsmouth:

I was entitled to working tax credits and family tax credits while working as a site foreman, but when a forklift truck crushed both my legs, I lost my income. I told HMRC that my earnings had changed, but the payments continued unaltered for four years. I got the fright of my life when I got a letter on Christmas Eve stating I had been overpaid tax credits by HMRC for the last four years without anyone realizing, least of all me! I was told I owed the government a massive £26,000. I had no idea I was not entitled to the cash, and I have no way of paying it back.

I thought these credits were to help people on low incomes. I was assessed to get that money earning £300 a week and then my income dropped to £150 from industrial injury benefit and a disability pension. I was of the opinion I'd still be entitled to the tax credits. I thought we might even be entitled to a bit more. But now they're saying because I can't work I'm not entitled to it. It's a joke.

We've got a young family. How are we supposed to live on £150 a week? There's no way I can afford to pay it back. They can't get blood out of a stone. It's their mistake. If you made the same mistake working for a private company you'd be sacked!

'More needs to be done to tackle error, which is why we have started on a rigorous counter-error strategy, aimed at slashing error by £1 billion over five years.' James Plaskitt MP

Alison, Portsmouth:

Lesbian and gay couples can expect tax problems if they don't declare they are cohabiting, but my honesty won our family a Christmas present, in 2005, of a £5880 overpayment bill from HM Revenue and Customs.

I sent off for my data to dispute recovery, and was shocked to find a catalogue of official errors and records marked 'household breakdown', referring to my partner as male.

After three years fighting, HMRC has *still* failed to apologise for its multiple errors, continual zeroing of my salary 'behind the scenes', heterosexist assumptions and for treating our cohabitation as a broken relationship, let alone for discriminatory practices which make overpayments commonplace for families headed by lesbian and gay parents.

My overpayment demand came without any explanation, and plunged me and my family into terror and despair, as we didn't have the money and I knew I could not possibly owe such a sum. The continual stress and worry has brought me recurrent migraines, insomnia, eczema and depression, and cost me hundreds of hours of my free time defending myself from the ever-present threat of wrongful prosecution.

Like hundreds of other innocent people, I have been fighting to avoid being taken to debtors' court, and have HMRC forcibly take money from me and my family without any independent review of my case.

The Low Incomes Tax Reform Group eventually forced HMRC to write off £2,450, because HMRC had lied to me on an award notice and stated that they had calculated my award from my correct salary. In fact, they had based their calculations on an incorrect salary of zero, caused by their own system failures, and eventually admitted that I couldn't possibly have known anything was wrong. They continued to chase me for overpayments without being able to specify the exact sum in question, let alone how it arose. I later heard that my alleged overpayment had 'peaked' at £6500 as a further overpayment was surreptitiously added.

After Financial Secretary Jane Kennedy's cryptic announcement in July 2007 of 'incorrect procedures' having been applied, and Conservative Shadow Chancellor George Osborne's discovery of 'illegal recovery', I was suddenly told, in September 2007, that I will not, after all, be expected to repay £3,429 of the money HMRC has been chasing me for, for the last two years.

Yet HMRC still want a further £723 back from me, caused by errors on my brief, joint claim (I have asked to be released from claiming further tax credits as they are so dangerous and unreliable). I have taken advice from a welfare rights advisor and am asking HMRC searching questions as it does not appear that I owe this money at all.

Angered by the way millions of honest claimants were being held responsible for HMRC mistakes, I became one of the founding members of Paula Dean's campaign group, Tax

Credit Casualties (TCC), seeking an Amnesty of all non-fraudulent overpayments. We took our concerns in June 2007 to Westminster, to the Treasury and Downing Street. Among other issues, we challenged HMRC officials about the Maternity Leave Trap, premature court action, and heterosexist practices (how fully compliant lesbian and gay couples were plunged into debt, and the poor anti-discriminatory training given to staff). Sneered at by one senior official, ironically an 'expert' on the Civil Partnership Act, we have nevertheless made some inroads into sloppy HMRC practice in many areas and have put whistleblowers in contact with the national press over insider fraud. Our Justice is an Amnesty campaign can be found here: www.taxCC.org

HMRC officials admitted to us in person that in the early years particularly the system was fraught with errors and claim to be using their discretion to write many of these off, but this is not my experience, nor that of the many TCC members I know. No accountability for HMRC, no justice for us, it seems.

**"...administrative failures are costing the exchequer serious sums of money, while in another part of the system, individual taxpayers lose out through the incompetent handling of the tax credits system. Gordon Brown, the man who led HMRC for 10 years, has to take responsibility for the mess he left behind."
David Gauke Shadow treasury minister**

Mrs Mullen, Omagh, N. Ireland:

In September 2007 I received an overpayment demand for £900 seeking repayment within 30 days, and threatening me with the legal costs if I did not promptly pay up. I was horrified, and immediately complained about the handling of my case.

In October my complaint was acknowledged and I was told I would have a full reply by 9th November 2007. I was horrified to receive a letter dated 15th November 2007 stating that this unpaid 'debt' had been submitted to my local Magistrates Court for the issue of a summons. There was no mention of considering my circumstances, giving me time to pay, or considering hardship, and evidently no communication between different parts of HMRC – the dispute and recovery teams – to record that this was still very much in dispute.

"...and evidently no communication between different parts of HMRC..."

I remain very unhappy with my treatment at the hands of HMRC.

I have been told by my representative that he has seen many examples of this same problem, bullying of this kind being rife within the system.

"Only a quarter of childless workers eligible for tax credits currently bother applying for them." Daily Mail

Alan, Newcastle:

When my wife & I split up in August 2003 we informed the Tax Credit Office the next day.

They failed to update their records and continued to post cheques to us which we weren't entitled to.

We kept telling them about this, and they told us to destroy the cheques which we did.

Then in 2005 they said we had been overpaid by £1,500 (which was the value of the cheques that they send and we destroyed on their instructions). We appealed, they said we hadn't told them of our change in circumstances until November 2003!

While we were in the appeal/dispute process, they threatened to take us to court to recover the alleged overpayment - despite having previously written to us saying that they would not!

"The whole thing is a National disgrace."

They did this three times!

Finally, I obtained copies of our paperwork and CD recordings of our telephone conversations with them by sending them a SARN Request, and found the copy of our telephone call telling them of our change in circumstances in August.

The alleged overpayment was written off and I received £100 as an apology. I also received a letter from Dawn Primarolo who was in charge of the Tax Credit Fiasco at that time in which she states; "We (HMRC Tax Credits) made mistakes repeatedly with your claim".

I think it is appalling that we - their "customers" - have to find their mistakes for them!

Today I am a member of the Tax Credit Casualties www.TaxCC.org which is a help forum and we are seeing cases exactly the same as mine was.

Does HMRC Tax Credits not learn anything from their mistakes - of which there are far too many?

The whole thing is a National disgrace.

"Many people find themselves with overpayments and don't understand why." Citizens Advice spokeswoman Katie Lane.

Alastair & Rosina, Matlock:

My husband and I claimed Tax Credits after our business (a convenience store) made a loss 2 years running due to staff theft. I dealt with most of the paperwork and never understood the figures they put on the forms as allowances etc. weren't explained. I even rang them once before sending back a form to say that I didn't understand the workings out and was told that I must do before I sent it in (this is on the CD that they sent us with our data) but as the conversation went on and covered other areas, the woman I was speaking to forgot about it and finished by telling me not to worry about my entitlement and to send in the form.

There are only 3 calls recorded on the CD and I know I made at least another 4 calls, in one of which I informed them that both my children, for whom I was receiving Child Tax Credit, had left full-time education and started work. They have since said that I didn't tell them until much later and have claimed back an amount that they said was overpaid. You don't expect to need to tape your phone calls to an official body, you expect them to act responsibly.

We have repeatedly asked them to explain how the amounts are arrived at for the tax credits but all we finally got from them was a restatement of the figures that they'd already sent - no workings out so we could see if we really were overpaid. They have never given us the information to be able to work out what amount was due to us (as you can work out your Income Tax and the N.I. contributions by applying percentages to your earnings) so we couldn't know whether we were being overpaid or not! They are arguing that we should! Another part of our argument is that, as a small business, we never knew how much we would be earning until well after the end of the tax year, so again couldn't be sure that the figures on the forms were correct, even if we'd understood how they were arrived at.

"They have never given us the information to be able to work out what amount was due to us..."

For the 2 years that we were being stolen from we kept the business going by using all our savings (a small legacy from my husband's father) and running up thousands of pounds of debt on credit cards - so claiming nothing from the State - and used the Tax Credits to pay most of these off, although we still have credit card debt. If we repay the thousands that they are asking for, we shall be worse off than when we started as interest rates have gone up and the credit card companies have clamped down on transferring debt from one to the other to keep the charges down.

We will end up worse off.

"The system is far too complex," Chas Roy-Chowdhury from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

Penny, Worcestershire:

What is your experience of the tax credit system?

My experience of the Tax Credit system has been heartbreaking, and not one which I would wish upon my worst enemies.

Have you been treated fairly, respectfully and as an individual?

I have not been treated fairly as an individual. The personal details of my whole family were sent through the post in an UNSEALED envelope. This included all the information that anyone would need to steal identities. The copy of my personal details that I received had been tampered with (vital information had been tippexed out). No replacement copy has been provided.

Have you experienced problems?

I have experienced MANY problems.

Have these been properly addressed?

These problems have not been properly addressed and are causing further problems. For example my husband's NI number was incorrectly entered into the system when we first claimed and even though we told them that it was wrong they did not change it. It has caused him problems with his self-assessment and he now has 3 different NI numbers. Also HMRC are withholding a tax refund (overpaid tax) that is due to me because I am in dispute with them over the tax credits overpayment, even though they have refunded my husband his overpaid tax.

How have you found communication and correspondence?

Communication with HMRC is extremely difficult, bordering on impossible. Letters remain unanswered for months, emails result in automated responses, telephone calls are not returned and get cut off if the questions are too difficult.

Has it all made sense to you?

No!! There appears to be one set of rules for the Tax Office and another for every other individual. We appear to have no right to a fair court hearing.

Do you feel your rights have been respected?

No!! Most of the time I feel that I've been treated as a case number with no rights at all, not a human being who has done nothing wrong. At times I have been spoken to like I'm a criminal, not a customer of HMRC.

Have you been threatened with court action at an early stage?

Yes, but so far have managed to fend off the court date. I really worry about this.

Have any important documents gone astray, or have you received correspondence meant for another person?

Yes. The whole reason for our alleged overpayment is that we never received some key documents and therefore we were not able to return them to the Tax Credit office.

Would you recommend claiming tax credits to others?

NO, NO, NO!!! Stealing the crown jewels, prostitution and selling a kidney would be easier, less humiliating and less painful.

How has all of this affected you and your family?

Mounting debt, depression, stress and associated health problems, huge pressure on relationships.

"The Treasury must stop burying its head in the sand and finally accept that Gordon Brown's brainchild is failing families. The tax credit system is overly complex and a mystery to all but the special advisers in the Treasury. It continues to burden families by clawing back overpayments and errors." Danny Alexander Liberal Democrat Work and Pensions spokesman

Sarah, Fareham:

My husband was made redundant in 2003. He was unemployed for 3 months then went to work in Scotland for a year self employed. We had no idea what he was going to end up with once expenses were taken into account. When he did finally get a permanent job (which pays overtime, call out and stand-by) again, we had no idea what he was going to end up with in his pay packet. We called the Tax Credit People in October 2004 and informed them we were not going to claim any more as it was already in one hell of a mess and we had no confidence in them to get it right anyway!!!

Since then we have had demands (usually by phone) for just under £2,000 along with threats of pay within seven days or "we are taking you to court".

I wrote to them and called them for a breakdown of how this figure arose. It took 1 year for them to explain how the figure was made up. They say we have to pay back all the benefits paid by them between April and October 2004 because we didn't fill in a form. What form, we asked? Send it out and we will fill it in!! Not possible because that is in the past, they say. We say if we had received this form we would have filled it in and returned it to you. They don't want to talk about it.

"Since then we have had demands (usually by phone) for just under £2,000 along with threats of pay within seven days or ..."

We have lodged another appeal and are waiting for the next threatening phone call. I did ask to meet with someone and come to a solution, but they won't do face-to-face meetings. Then I asked what about all the £100's we are entitled to, but didn't claim for fear of that being overpaid and yet more debt building up? Tough, they said - we can't claim in retrospect!!!!

We are determined to fight this.

Plus the fact we just don't have £2,000 sitting around doing nothing!!!

"Once again, the levels of claimant error and fraud in the tax credit schemes are unacceptably high," NAO comptroller and auditor general Sir John Bourn

Laurie, Leigh on Sea:

This is my experience of Tax Credits when things go wrong, which has just recently been resolved after my local MP assisted.

From the beginning we received over 15 Award Notices each; some copies were just nonsense and dated 00/00/0000. It has taken over three and a half years and at least 30 letters, numerous phone calls and several nights lost sleep, and I sincerely wish that I had never received the payments. HMRC have been polite but have never answered my concerns, even where I could prove that their staff had lied or were simply negligent. They just turn out the same statements almost as if they are rubber stamped.

This is a summary of my dealings:

May 04 I notified HMRC that my circumstances were changing as my daughter was about to turn 18.

June 04 I found several unexplained amounts were going into our bank account.
I phoned the helpdesk and was told this was a back payment.

Aug 04 Spoke to someone in similar circumstances and found I was getting more than them. Phoned helpdesk and was told there was an error and that I was not due the entire amount. Also told that I would be contacted next day but nothing happened.

Sept 04 Letter received asking for over £7,000 re payment. I wrote back saying I had contacted HMRC twice to check the payment and that I had now spent nearly £3,000 of the sum.

Nov 04 Received a phone call asking how much I could pay back and I said £4,000. Two weeks later received a letter asking for £5,000. I wrote back saying I didn't believe this was fair and HMRC had appeared to have broken their own terms/conditions in the leaflets they sent to me.

Jan 05 Letter received saying they would look into it

Jan 06 Letter received stating it had been investigated and I would have to pay back full amount and I couldn't appeal. I wrote back asking why my requests for transcripts of phone calls had been ignored and could they advise me what to do next.

Aug 06 Received letter saying we were owed £45 but we still had outstanding money to repay back – but this amount was different from the original. I wrote back stating I had taken early retirement, did not have the money and could I attend an interview so I can show all the confusing paperwork and sort it out for good.

Sept 06 Letter received ignoring my requests and stating that all my evidence was considered in my appeal which was dealt with in Jan 06. I wrote back stating once again my points had been ignored and that the most I could afford would be £3,000 a year which would equate to 25% of our income.

I then received another letter stating I had no right of appeal and I could be liable to legal proceedings. No mention of my offer or my points I had raised.
Nov 06 After getting advice from Tax Credit Casualties, I asked HMRC for my data under Data Protection Act.

Jan 07 Documents arrive with letter saying CD of phone calls on way soon.

Feb 07 CD arrives and another letter, threatening legal action and stating payment must reach you before 8th March.

From the data supplied by HMRC, it is apparent that my appeal was based on paperwork headed 'Managers Appeal Decision' which had tick boxes to four separate questions. I can prove from other paperwork included that all four answers were wrong. I can also prove that the transcripts of the phone calls made for the appeal are either misleading or in certain critical points wrong from the CD supplied. I write again and state all this and asked for it to be looked at again.

March 07 Two letters received both stating that HMRC needed more time.

April 07 Another letter stating I still have to repay the sum. This letter, like all previously, ignores my points including the fact that the appeal was based on incorrect facts and thus the conclusions were incorrect. This letter states that I must have realised the payment was incorrect as one of our award notices said our income was £0.00 which is the main factor in ensuring award is right, so we should have realised the mistake.

I write back strongly disputing this and enclose a copy of this and every other award notice I had received, all of which showed our income correctly.

May 07 Letter received saying sorry but we still owe the money, no mention of the points I have raised since the beginning.

June 07 In desperation I write to my MP. His first appeal on my behalf fails and I am told I will have to still pay it back but he tries again.

Finally in Jan 08 I get a letter from HMRC saying that I do not now have to pay!

"...another appalling indictment of the administrative incompetence at the heart of Gordon Brown's tax credit system. Philip Hammond, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury

Mrs Campbell, Newry N Ireland:

I was deeply concerned by the content and tone of a letter sent to me demanding details for a tax credit investigation, and when I rang for more information, I was abruptly dismissed with the view that this is going to happen whether I liked it or not. I felt that the information requested is an unwarranted intrusion, with some information requested dating back to before Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit actually existed and therefore having no bearing on the tax credit award in question. The letter related to a tax credit issue and not a self assessment return and Kevin Higgins of Adviceni suspected that general HMRC practice was being inappropriately applied, and challenged this successfully on my behalf – although it was still hugely stressful. Why are innocent people being treated like criminals?

"Far too many low-income families are on a financial rollercoaster because of the enormous complexity of a system that too often gives with one hand and takes away with the other.' Tax credits were introduced in 1998 and were designed to encourage the unemployed - and particularly single mothers - to take jobs by paying supplements to the income of anyone working more than 16 hours a week." Danny Alexander Liberal Democrats' work and pensions spokesman

Clare, Newmarket:

I have been in dispute for a number of years over the over payments system, so finding www.taxCC.org was extremely useful in having further experience and support in progressing to stages I would not have done on my own. The Tax Credit Office (TCO) have only just stopped taking money from me in relation to my weekly payments as I did not know till 6 months ago it was illegal, and then it took them 6 months to cease recovery with Paula's support.

My experience of the Tax Credit System is not a good one as I do not feel I have been treated fairly, or respected as an individual. I have been continually fobbed off, told things would happen that don't, i.e. advised people will phone me within a set time period from the dispute department regarding the illegal payments (48 hours). I am still waiting, and I am having to phone them, putting money on my phone bill. The issues have not been properly addressed; they say they have not received information or I have not done something or ignored issues deliberately. I know this is not true, as they were all contained in the same letter. When I ring I cannot talk to anyone, as they cannot give me that number or put me through. They suggest I write and then that still takes ages or they ignore my letters.

"I have been continually fobbed off, told things would happen that don't"

Communication and correspondence is atrocious, as they said they haven't received things and they have. A couple of years ago I had the disability element removed from my claim three times and it took 1-2 months to get my payments back at the normal amount. All they kept saying was, you will get any money back you are due. They do not care that you rely on that amount coming in to pay your bills and if you don't have it you fall behind due to *their* incompetence. All they said is nobody changes anything unless you ring, but I had phoned with new details for my partner 3-4 times. They had gone off their system when I phoned again - you cannot trust their systems!

Personally if I did not need the money I would most definitely not recommend claiming tax credits to others. It is a complete shambles and they are making the people claiming the money pay for *their* stupid errors, bad systems and lack of explanation into how it works, etc.

**“No warning that Tax Law applied to HMRC errors: ‘The Government says that...nine out of 10 families can get Child Tax Credit which - despite its name - is nothing to do with tax at all. It is a benefit paid directly to the main carer...”
BBC Website**

John, Ayre, Scotland:

I was mistakenly overpaid in tax year 2003 -2004. Despite my attempts to communicate with HMRC both on the telephone and by letter to arrange repayment of this award, I was unable to pay back the overpayment at the time. Communication from HMRC led me to believe that the overpayment would be annulled during the course of my future claims. (They had elected to award me tax credits but did not pay them to me, informing me that they would recover the payments from previous claims).

Obviously, I assumed that this information was correct. Due to a change in circumstances recently, I was alarmed to find that I had been misled by HMRC, and that I now (some three-and-a-half years later) was expected to repay the overpayment immediately: a sum still outstanding of around £4000.

Again, contacting HMRC by telephone, I feel I am receiving conflicting advice each time I call, sometimes verging on the abusive.

My situation is still on-going, and I have today (03 01 08) submitted yet another letter to HMRC accompanied by a Tax Credits Overpayment Dispute Form which I was only informed of prior to Christmas 2007. In addition, I have received from HMRC a Final Demand Notice for the outstanding amount or they will consider legal proceedings.

My experience of HMRC can only be described as appalling. I certainly do not feel that I have been treated fairly or as an individual. I feel I have lost my rights as a citizen of the UK. I find the whole situation extremely distressing and I am astonished to find through research that I am far from alone!

The communication within this government department is shocking, verging on the incompetent. Systems in place do not allow an individual's right of appeal, the telephone staff, although usually quite helpful, do not communicate effectively between each other. They consistently offer conflicting advice which would indicate that they themselves do not know what is happening.

I am now a single parent with two teenage children and at present, we are facing a very bleak future due to the ineptitude of the HMRC. In light of this, I would NOT recommend anyone to claim Child Tax Credits, in fact, quite the contrary, I would suggest where possible to steer well clear of HMRC.

Update 08 02 08

I contacted Member of Parliament in December 2007, listing full details of my situation so far. My MP agreed to write to HMRC on my behalf.

HMRC responded within two weeks, but merely argued their case regarding the initial overpayment. My MP immediately passed the letter on to me, and asked for my comments.

“Tax credits - or state benefits by another name - have been central to Gordon Brown's way of doing things. Theoretically, they help the Government target particular groups - such as pensioners and young families - without handing out money to those who don't need it. In practice, tax credits are complicated to claim and at one stage, an annual £2.9billion were going unclaimed.”
The Express

Andy, Peterborough:

A brief summary of the calamity and lies that come from many people within HMRC is detailed here.

August 2005, annual review pack sent in. Letter received back thanking me for providing new information - however some information was missing. I telephoned them and between myself and the person on the phone we worked out what info was missing and we got everything sorted. She told me that was all I had to do. A couple of weeks later I received a letter saying that as my salary had increased all of my award for 2005 – 2006 had been paid and therefore I wouldn't receive any more money until April 2006. This made sense and I accepted that.

In January 2006 I received a letter informing me that I had 7 days to pay £1583 or face court proceedings. I phoned HMRC immediately to dispute the alleged overpayment and the person then told me that I should be receiving another letter that said I owed a further £1200. He also told me that I didn't have a claim in place and that I should claim as I was owed money. I was astounded at what I was hearing, I couldn't believe my claim had been cancelled and yet they owed me money. I requested a dispute pack, COP26, and this suspended proceedings thankfully.

New claim form filled in and money received.

Around May 2006 I received another letter demanding the total of £2700 and I again requested the dispute pack as the first had not arrived.

I received a letter later in the year rejecting my dispute as I hadn't supplied information. No further details were given to me.

January 2007 I complained again and said that I had provided details. Again this was rejected. Letter received stated that I had sent the annual declaration form in incomplete and after several requests I had not been in touch and therefore my claim ended and I owed all the money for 2006. It was obvious to me that they were lying but they would not listen to my details where I had called etc. I was also told again that there was no right of appeal, another lie.

**"Four out of five families with children have their living standards determined not by working harder or gaining qualifications, but by the swish of the Chancellor's pen in setting arbitrary eligibility levels for tax credits."
Frank Field MP**

Diana, Watford:

My name is Diana and I am a victim of Tax Credit Overpayment. Like millions, my husband and I were lured into the trap of claiming this so-called benefit at its inception in 2003. 'Money With Your Name on It' was the slogan. Now we find it only has your name on it until HMRC decides it wants it back. Three years after the event in our case.

We filled in all forms when asked and I even rang the Tax Credit Office on more than one occasion to tell them my income had changed. I was assured by the friendly person on the other end of the line that there was no need to worry as payments would 'even themselves out over time'. Sure enough, after a few months, the payments dwindled and then ceased altogether.

I was aware that problems existed with the payment of Tax Credits because I heard it on the BBC's 'Watchdog', and read about it in the press. So I always checked any paperwork we received very carefully and there was never any mention of a large overpayment, only one of £178.30.

That is, until May 2006, when, out of the blue a demand for repayment of an overpaid sum of £2,565 landed on our doormat! This was said to relate to the Tax Year 2003/4! We had never heard about this before. It made no sense.

Sadly, my husband and I had recently separated, and we were dealing with all the trauma and fallout from that in the best way we could for the sake of our family. We had agreed our financial affairs and both taken on large mortgages so that we could provide consistency for our children. Did HMRC seriously think that we had that kind of money lying around?

After a lot of research and disputing, it has transpired that the overpayment was due to multiple errors on the part of HMRC about which we could have had no knowledge. These errors did not show up on any documents sent to us.

All of this cuts no ice with HMRC. Yes, it has made mistakes but we, the innocent victims, must pay for them no matter what. This organisation acts as its own judge and jury and thinks that it was quite reasonable for us to have known our payments were wrong! We are still trying to resolve this. It's never ending. We cannot plan our futures or move on.

Apart from when I was looking after my young family, we have both paid tax all of our working lives. We are not fraudsters or criminals. I once had a parking ticket – that's the extent of my criminal activity. We brought up three children, including one who is severely disabled, without complaint and with minimal help from the state. Now we are penalised for trusting in the efficiency and integrity of the Government and its servants.

I would never recommend anyone to claim this so called benefit, no matter how desperate they are. I am in despair as new members join 'Tax Credit Casualties almost daily, all with similar tales to tell. Oh yes, and my sister is a victim too.

I hope that the Honourable Members will pause to consider whether there are any merits to a benefit that people are frightened to claim in case they are asked to pay the money back years later. The whole thing is a disgrace and HMRC is treating the public with contempt. Nothing short of an amnesty for honest victims will do!!!

"The system was designed to incorporate a degree of overpayment since the initial awards are provisional. Edward Leigh MP.

Paul, Cambridge:

HMRC told me they had written off an overpayment for 2004-2005, based on an income figure of "NIL" (a common problem), but this is the first time I've heard of an overpayment for that year. If they wrote it off for one year when they made mistakes, why are they chasing me for the same mistake made for a different year?

I wrote to HMRC pointing out that nothing in their demand letters tells people: 1) that the debt may be paid by installments, and 2) that people can dispute the overpayment, with information on how to proceed if they wish to. Most people would not know they have the option of an installment plan because they are not informed on the debt recovery letter. You have to ask. No-one has answered my letter, and I have been passed from "Pillar to post".

I have asked HMRC to show me the authority they rely on to threaten me with court and claim: "At the hearing the magistrates will not be able to consider any dispute you may have about the debt." I have learned that I am entitled to be shown by HMRC the authority they hold for taking away individuals' Common Law right to a fair hearing based on evidence produced before a Court of Law according to Metropolitan Asylum District v Hill 1881.

HMRC and government officials are keen to claim that "More than six million families are better off as a result of receiving tax credits and therefore the numbers of people posting their cases on these websites [www.taxCC.org] are in a minority". We are never told the statistics for the number of people who are asked to pay back overpayments – the vast majority of whom don't know about these forums. Or indeed know they can dispute the overpayment and instead suffer undue distress and hardship from a system which is supposed to be achieving the opposite.

Paying back under duress is not a mark of satisfaction with the system, but just further evidence of its many failings. Is HMRC going to honestly, openly and readily apologise for its failure to tell people their rights? I don't think so!

"Cash strapped families all over Britain are continuing to face severe hardship due to the ongoing tax credits fiasco. Gordon Brown's flagship welfare reform, which was first introduced in 2003, pays out £17billion in tax credits to around six million families every year." The Express

Deborah, Reading:

I was once one of the lucky people for whom Tax Credits seemed to be working. There was once or twice a mistake on my award form, but I soon sorted that out with a call to the Helpline. But it always worried me that I couldn't understand the award form - what did all those figures mean? How would I know if something were really wrong? But hey ho, I was always a responsible adult, making sure that I informed HMRC of any changes to what was happening in our lives.

My partner and I first made our joint claim when our daughter was born in 2004. Although he has two daughters from a previous marriage and we would have them stay with us twice a month we never claimed for them. Then on the 1st March 2008 his oldest daughter of 13 came to live with us. I waited a month to see if this was going to be temporary or permanent and on 27th March called the Helpline to say that she was living with us. "That's all been updated" said the voice on the end of the phone....

A week later we received Final Decision notices for 2005/6 and 2006/7 and a letter for 2007/8 stating that as we had no children we were not eligible for Tax Credits and someone would contact us shortly to let us know how we could repay the money. That's a grand total of over £12,000 (more than we earn in a year).

I cannot describe how sick I felt - I immediately called the Helpline to be told that it was a mistake by "Head Office" and that ".....someone would call in a few days." A week later I called the line again to be given the same answer. Someone would call in a few days. A week later and I was told when I called that someone ".....might ring in a few weeks".

So now we have a massive debt that we do not owe hanging over our heads, two children to feed and clothe and care for. Debts are mounting and will continue to do so as bills were paid from the monies that went into my account. Being pregnant I do not need extra reason for sleepless nights, for the extra stress and worry about this debt that has been caused by someone else's error. I absolutely abhor and detest disrespectful behaviour - and the way that HMRC are behaving seems to be the most blatant disrespectful behaviour I have ever come across.

"According to PAC figures, around 2million families a year have gone into debt to the Government in this way since 2003." Sunday Express

Robert, Bristol:

On 8th August 2005 I contacted the Tax Credit Office (TCO) and informed *MF* (a Helpline worker) that I had lost my job and updated my income figure. I was waiting for the figure of my Incapacity Benefit to arrive, so I asked if she could give me an estimate on how much tax credits I would be entitled to. She replied that they needed the Incapacity Benefit figure in order to work out the award. Also in this conversation is the fact that I would not be entitled to tax credits from 31st August 2005 as my son was leaving full time education.

On 12th August 2005 I rang the TCO office to give them the figure from my Incapacity Award that had arrived that day. I told *SD* the figure of my incapacity benefit so the TCO could work out my award

Then a bank statement arrived mid August with large payments on it from the TCO. I thought it was a bit strange, as I was only expecting to be paid until the end of August, and only a small amount (as we had been told on 8th August that we were no longer entitled to tax credits from the end of that month).

Therefore, I waited to see if any paperwork or letters of explanation would arrive. Nothing came, so on 20th August I rang the TCO office, spoke to *KC*, and asked what the payments were for. She told me the payments were mine, and were correctly worked out on a salary of £xxxxx. She also told us we were no longer entitled to tax credits from the end of August.

I then waited for the award notice to arrive and checked the income figure and indeed, it had my correct salary shown on it.

Unfortunately, they made a mistake, and processed my award without using the Incapacity Benefit figure, even though they had told me it was needed before the award could be worked out. When, later, I sent off for the data the TCO hold on my claim, I found that their 'house notes' of 8th August did not show that they were waiting for me to supply my Incapacity Benefit figure. It seems that the award was mistakenly processed without it, yet they are blaming me for their failings to process the information I gave them correctly!

They also failed to supply an award notice or letter stating the income figure that had *actually* been used to work out my award, for which they had, for some unknown reason, used an incorrect figure of £9,091.00, and not my correct income of £xxxxx *which appears on the only award notice issued...*

I had to make multiple requests to get the call from 8th August that proves I supplied all the correct information that HM Revenue and Customs (who run the TCO) failed to act upon. I am constantly told different stories. My letters go unanswered. Questions I ask are ignored, as they will not reveal the real truth as to the incompetence caused by HMRC. Along with many others, I am still fighting my case, years later.

"Nine million pounds was spent on the 'Money with your name on it' campaign, which stated: "If you're bringing up children you're contributing to the UK. That's why tax credits are changing so that nine out of ten families are now entitled to them... So if you've earned it, make sure you claim it because it's money with your name on it." Hansard

Tim, Southampton:

The Tax Credit Office (run by HM Revenue and Customs) did not bother to reply to correspondence sent to them, many, many months ago, by me and my accountants. Instead, they wrote to me on 3rd January 2008 demanding repayment.

I had previously sent them TWO appeals which clearly showed evidence that I was NOT overpaid £2632.22 in tax credits. We have also had letters from the TCO which give conflicting figures.

Although, under government guidelines, I am entitled to a response to my two appeals, we have had no such response from HMRC. The matter has now been going on over a year, when it should have been dealt with within a reasonable time.

Mr F told me he had complained bitterly to our local tax office. No satisfactory answer to this awful error was ever received.

I was also made aware that HMRC confused MY tax details with my former next-door neighbour's tax details. They sent Mr F's tax details to my address, and I sent them back to them, not knowing who Mr F was. Next, Mr F himself called at my house to inform me of the error. He had been told by the local tax office, where he met officials, that our details had been "inexplicably mixed up" on 23rd December 2006.

What a MESS! This was also a breach of the Data Protection Act.

Mr F told me he had complained bitterly to our local tax office. No satisfactory answer to this awful error was ever received.

I contacted my local tax office by phone, as HMRC asked me to do in one of their letters. I explained my position to them and they AGREED with my case that I had NOT been overpaid tax credits, and told me to launch my second appeal as I had heard nothing from HMRC in response to appeal number one. This was done, yet HMRC did not have the courtesy to respond to this either.

I have now asked for my case details to be forwarded to the financial Ombudsman who covers the Tax Credit department, so that I can lodge a complaint with them over the mishandling of this matter.

"...in 2005 the notoriously complex system was plunged into chaos after it emerged that administrative errors had led to the Government overpaying billions of pounds worth of child tax credit and working family tax credit. Subsequent efforts by the Government to claw back the cash have been the cause of much anxiety among hard-up families who had gone ahead and spent the money, thinking it belonged to them." Express

Kim, Southampton:

I have experienced a nightmare with tax credits from day one, none of it down to my error. I have been left allegedly owing £19,670. I have received over 60 different award notices, all with different figures on them. It culminated in the break up of my marriage after 21 years, and when they sent me an enforcement notice in November for the full amount of money, I had a complete breakdown and tried to commit suicide. I am still on anti-depressants now because of the trauma.

I never received even half this amount of money, and all the errors stemmed from the original claim. When I asked for a copy of the claim form via my MP, to prove I had not lied on it, they wrote back to say it could not be traced!!!

After involving my MP, I wrote a letter of complaint, and went through each mistake and copied every award letter I had ever received and sent the whole lot off to them.

Recently I received a letter. They have admitted all of it was their mistake, some down to an IT error, but they have written off the entire amount. They also admitted each subsequent year I gave them the correct information, they worked out my claim on the preceding years information which they knew was wrong.

It all started at 2003/04, despite giving full income details, details of a disablement benefit I receive, and sending in p60's to prove income, just to be on the safe side. I found that my income was recorded OK, and my husband's was nil for working 40 hours per week (he has never earned nil and I didn't put that on the form). My daughter was apparently in receipt of higher rate DLA according to them, but that was not the case. I got DLA at that time but the lower rate care component, a big difference. They also missed off my middle son aged 13 at the time, completely, and missed out the childcare I was claiming for.

This initial claim took 6 months to sort out. It went to my MP to get finalised and when it did, I never received an award notice, just a massive lump sum paid into my bank which I queried, and was told was right. I continued to query, same answer.

2004/05, adjustment was finally made. We were not entitled to Working Tax Credit, only Child Tax Credit, but they continued to pay us for part of the year, despite us telling them all their details were wrong, putting it in writing, involving my MP again, and getting them to intervene. They claimed I was paid double the amount of money I had actually received. I had to obtain copies of all bank statements to prove I hadn't received £2,000 they said I had.

2005/06 payments were made through my employer for Working Tax Credit but they know I am not entitled to WTC. I also know it, ring them and tell them, but they

continue to pay me, so I put the money aside.

For each of the overpayments, I have disputed the amount they say they have paid as the figures are all incorrect, and have gone back to 2003 bank statements to prove the figures.

It's been hellish.

2007, separated from my husband because of the stress, I work part time, earn just over 13k pa, know I am entitled to something, but am too scared to claim.

I was getting ready to sell my house to pay this overpayment which all snowballed from 2003/04. To have finally received the letter saying they are not going to ask me to pay back the money is unbelievable, I keep reading it over and over and have asked my MP to check to see if it really is true.

I am thinking about claiming compensation, but I am just too worried in case they decide to reverse their decision about the overpayment.

Tax credits have ruined my life.

Postscript

I now have the letter confirming my overpayment write-off.

They knew I wasn't entitled to WTC in 05/06 but continued to pay me. They were told by me it was incorrect, they had ample opportunity to recalculate it but didn't, and didn't act on all my previous complaints about the original award causing all the problems. I have lost count of the times I told them that my husband did not earn nil (they had it recorded as nil earnings but working 40 hours a week), and that my daughter did not get higher rate DLA but that I was in receipt of lower rate care component DLA.

Add to that the supposed missing claim form, both electronic scanned copy and hard copy, which they miraculously managed to find when they needed to check something their end. I think that was the catalyst for them writing this off as they contradicted themselves in an earlier letter to my MP saying they couldn't find the form, and it could now be proved I didn't lie on the form.

Basically they caused all the problems, but it took 5 years for them to recognise it, they would not listen to me, completely dismissed the fact that 03/04 was the cause of the ongoing problems, and I still haven't received an apology for the distress, trauma and ultimate break up of my marriage. My health both physical and mental has suffered as a result and when I received the enforcement notice, it flipped me over the edge. It's been horrific but I can now look forward to the future. I will be asking for compensation so that is the next step on the ladder.

"Experts have renewed calls for an overhaul of Gordon Brown's flagship tax credits programme following publication of another damning report on the system. It is continuing to fail, with fraud and errors still rife," Sunday Express

Jackie, Hampshire:

HMRC threatened to take me to court if I didn't pay my alleged overpayment back in full by 11th November, obviously I panicked.

I sent a TC846 form off informing them that they'd omitted my eldest son out of my claim at some stages. This was eventually rectified after I was accused of not informing them of their mistake, then I got accused of not giving them the right information in relation to my income!! I tried to tell them that this was also their fault as they'd given me wrong advice at the initial claim stage - of course, that got turned round back onto me too!!

I sent another TC846 form off saying about the wrong advice, I didn't realise that formally disputing was an option. I sent the first Data Protection letter, waiting the 20 days it takes them to process it, and I then received copies of letters, some recent screen shots for 2006 and telephone calls etc.

However, we noticed that the most crucial call where they told me to put £0 in my income for 2001-2002 (due to having been a full time student) for the 2002-2003 award, was missing off their CD. Luckily I had made a note of the time, date and name of the person I spoke to, and also have it showing on my telephone bill for back then, so I asked for that call, and again gave them 20 days.

I then received a letter back from them, trying to say that the call I want is the one that is 'under track 2', however that is not the case! Oh and they apologised that their reply was not more favourable, which to me implies that they are guilty!!

We are now wondering whether to send a 'missing data' letter, or go on to the next stage - 'case history 2nd tier complaint'. It is all too complicated and unfair to claimants to have to sort the HMRC's errors out, especially when claimants are just doing what they've been told to do!

"The campaign idea, 'It's Money With Your Name On It', is intended to motivate people to claim their entitlement. In other words, they are entitled to this money in recognition of their contribution to the UK - through bringing up children, or working. So, the money is rightfully theirs and they should make sure they claim." Gordon Brown

Les, Basildon:

As a law abiding citizen I have always respected those in Public office and members of their staff e.g. HMRC.

What a mistake that was. I became unemployed several times, through redundancy and company closures, from 2003 - 2005. As is the norm, I 'signed on' at my local Job Centre.

After a particularly bad year (2004) where I managed to remove myself from the unemployment register on two separate occasions I found myself returned to the Job centre in November of 2004. Only to be told that because my original claim started and finished earlier in the same year I was not entitled to any FURTHER Job Seekers Allowance payments. That was when my troubles really began.

My JSA advisor explained that I would be 'entitled' to Tax Credits and as my advisor he would assist me to complete the relevant forms. Another mistake! We were duly helped to complete these forms and subsequently received the Tax Credit payments via my wife's wages.

In the following year, February 2005, I wrote to the Tax Credit Office advising them that I would be returning to full time employment in March 2005 and requesting that ALL further payments should therefore stop. Unfortunately we received another Tax Credit payment in April 2005. I immediately contacted HMRC and explained *their* error, they 'thanked' me for my honesty, and the overpayment was duly recovered from my wife's earnings over the next month or so. End of story?

Of course not! We received a letter telling us we had received an overpayment of £329:92. I replied immediately that we informed the Tax Credit Office/HMRC of this fact and the overpayment had been duly repaid. Of course they requested proof. I then, stupidly, sent them the wage slips P45, P60 to prove this fact. HMRC duly 'lost' this paperwork.

Since then I have disputed, complained, written to my MP and the Tax Credit Casualties (www.taxCC.org). The initial overpayment has now risen from £392:92 to a whopping £3,698:19 and rising.

The stress and worry this has put upon my family has been intolerable, my wife even threatened to leave me because of our mounting debts. The most annoying part about this whole event is now that I am unemployed once again and entitled to Tax Credits. I will not even give them the chance and would rather go hungry than ask for them to 'help' me again.

I have now come to distrust those in public office and certainly do not respect those employed by them, especially HMRC. WHY OH WHY ARE HMRC NOT BOUND BY THE SAME LAWS AND REGULATIONS AS THE REST OF THE NATION?

To use an example: If I owned a company and *YOU* were receiving payments from MY company for an insurance settlement, for instance; if *YOU* informed my company that you were fit and returning to work, would it not be my responsibility to stop these payments? If *YOU*, the person receiving these payments, then received another payment and duly told me, in writing, of this overpayment, which I then recovered, wouldn't any further payments, not detectable via normal circumstances, then become MY responsibility? If I then realised MY mistake, the person who had received those overpayments (in good faith, who in other words did not know) could and I would hope *should* claim the 'Doctrine of ESTOPPEL'. Yes, of course they could, it was after all my company's oversight, so it should be my responsibility to rectify the mistake, at least in the 'NORMAL' World.

Unfortunately, not in the World of HMRC. If for instance I told you to stop paying me 'wages' because I do not work for you any more, but six months later you still were, whose fault is that? Plus if you were paying these wages into a dormant bank account how could I possibly know? Well, that is just how I feel about the HMRC.

It is HMRC's mistake, not mine or my wife's. We obeyed the law of the land and duly informed them of our intentions. WE HAVE NOW BEEN IN DISPUTE OVER THESE CREDITS SINCE 2005/2006 BUT ACCORDING TO THEIR FIGURES THEY ARE STILL PAYING US CREDITS! Where and to whom we cannot determine, but the claim is now risen from the initial overpayment to several thousands.

If you asked me in 2005/06 'WILL YOU REPAY THIS OVERPAYMENT?' I WOULD HAVE OF COURSE REPLIED YES, BUT NOW? I am expecting my day in court. I do not care who you are, a government department, or a member of the public. We should ALL be expected to obey 'our' nation's laws, not to be 'exempt' because they (HMRC) AND THEIR OFFICERS are incompetent!

"A system recklessly rushed through? You have treated constituents like laboratory rats while making fat profits out of it." The Guardian

Brian, Lancashire:

In March last year we sent a letter to the Tax Credit Office (TCO) with details of changes in our income due to early retirement. The details we sent were entered onto the system incorrectly. This resulted in an overpayment.

When we eventually received a new award notice with the changes it was obvious to me that the income shown was wrong and we immediately informed the TCO. The problem is, even though the error was not ours, we now find ourselves having to pay back an unexpected debt, which with 2 teenagers and living on retirement income is causing us a significant problem. There was absolutely no mistake on our part, or any attempt to deceive. We have not received any explanation, just a notice that our Child Tax Credit will be reduced to recover any overpayment. My wish would be that overpayments caused by TCO error should not be claimed back, especially when those claiming Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit are not to blame.

“The Government must have been aware of all those issues [from Australia] when they devised their policy, but they have failed to address all of them with the relatively minor changes to their own policy, such as the disregard.”
Hansard

Dave, Doncaster:

I cannot express in words my sense of absolute outrage towards HM Revenue and Customs for ‘the train wreck’ that is the Tax Credit System.

Other than a mortgage my family have no debt (despite being made redundant 3 times), unless you take into account the £4000 - £5000 debt (it’s impossible to get any exact figure) created for us by the Tax Credit System.

Our problems started in August 03. I was made redundant and informed Tax Credits of our change in circumstances immediately.

Shortly afterwards my wife noticed sizable chunks of money deposited into her account. We contacted the Tax Credit Office (TCO) and we were informed not to worry, all was correct, the money belonged to us.

We then received a large cheque (£3800). Surely this was not right? Once again we contacted the TCO. Once again they stated that the money was correct.

I believe if something looks too good to be true then it probably is. So we called again on several occasions, stating our concerns. I requested a means to repay the money, I was told no vehicle existed by which to do this. The person on the other end of the line once again insisted the money was ours and virtually told me to stop ringing.

On 19/9/03 we received our new notice of award. We had been awarded a total of £7745.51.

The award was clearly wrong - it stated that we had £0 income. This was not true as my wife was still working and I had earned around £xxxxx already in the current tax year. We contacted TCO immediately and informed them of the mistake, giving them our correct earnings.

Incredibly they assured us not to worry about the payments, that the new figures provided by us only affected things by a few hundred pounds and this would be adjusted over the coming year.

The beginning of November we received our new award (dated 22/09/03). Our award was still wrong, as it stated earnings of only £9483.00, giving us an award of £6109.01.

Once again we rang TCO. Late December another update to the award (dated 07/11/03) wrong earnings stated yet again.

All the time this was going on TC were still paying us money, insisting it belong to us. We asked on several occasions to stop all payments. They took no notice of anything that we told them.

It took us until the end of the financial year to final get things sorted out, leaving us with a debt of around £5000 - fantastic.

Throughout this process, TCO staff were often unhelpful, sometimes arrogant and dismissive. It became increasingly difficult to get through to the TCO.

On several occasions I asked for dispute forms, full breakdown of figures and for supervisors to contact me. None of which ever happened.

In the end we completely gave up, the stress and anxiety became too much and HMRC started to claw back money from our following years awards.

In the tax year 05-06 once again they got our wages wrong despite being informed. We contacted the TCO on several occasions but each time we got our new award a further error had been made. It took weeks for new awards to arrive, by which time money was being deposited and we were being assured the money belonged to us and not to worry.

“Incredibly they assured us not to worry about the payments, that the new figures provided by us only affected things by a few hundred pounds and this would be adjusted over the coming year.”

In 2007 we received a demand for several thousand pounds. Apparently we had not filed a new claim. We had sent in the forms but the TCO had lost them. We managed to get our claim reinstated after a number of calls.

I have since filed a dispute for the years 03-04. My claim was denied because according to the TCO the system showed that we had zero income. This may well be the case but this is not based on information we provided. It is clearly a system error.

I have visited my local tax office that provided some info, but the person I met could not work out the figures and could not explain why we were having such problems.

I have since made a request under FOI to the TCO. The information sent was incomplete and interestingly omitted details from 2003-2004. I will be making a formal complaint to the Information Commissioner.

I do not know of a single person who having made a claim is not having difficulty with TCO. It is estimated that around two and a half million claimants are being overpaid each year. This system is fundamentally flawed, in that it is impossible to make upfront awards based on what a family's income may be.

If you are made redundant, get a pay rise, work overtime, marry, divorce, or die, you and your family are likely to end up owing money to the TCO. This, coupled with a widely discredited computer system and an unaccountable and incompetent HMRC lacking any transparency or public accountability, leaves many families in despair and debt.

I believe Gordon Brown's intention were admirable, however the system that is supposed to support families and children has left the vast majority in debt and crisis.

"Revenue staff routinely ignored correct procedures in reviewing 160,000 cases...a 'whistle blower' has now reportedly told the Conservative Party that the problem arose as a result of section 18 of the Tax Credit Act 2002 being routinely ignored." www.rightsnet.org.uk

Catherine and Lee, Lancashire

This story has a happy ending- sort of.

My boyfriend is disabled, but when he feels able to work, he prefers to. He can't work full time, can't afford to only work part time, but that is what tax credits are for, right? To help people into work, to help people to support themselves when there are genuine limits to their earning power. *Right?*

He returned to work through the Shaw Trust, a back-to-work initiative company - and they wanted to put him on their website as a success story. What he didn't know was that the tax credits they had promised him would not be set up until he rang the number, ordered the form, waited two weeks, filled it in, and sent it back. Four weeks seemed like a long time then- ah, so young and innocent!

The form did not come. He ordered another. By my calculations (if they were telling the truth) they sent five out, and even if they were fobbing us off, they must have sent at least three. Eventually, a form arrived. Just the one. He begged them on the phone to tell him a place he could go to drop it off. But there is no such place, is there?

Nothing came back to us. We made allowances for the bank holiday weekend, and then he rang again. They said they would put a trace on it, and - and this is important - they asked if there were *any other addresses it might have been sent to by mistake*. There was: his last address, where he had been living while receiving child tax credits for his daughter. He asked to be sent another form while they did the trace. No they would not.

A little over a week later, he rang again. And failed the security check. He had the address wrong, they said, so they couldn't talk to him. Someone had changed it to the older address!

They suggested he go to the local tax office. He did. They said they could not help him. He rang again, he went back, he cried, and eventually they gave him an appointment to come in again with ID. and bills, and sort his address out. He did so. They said to ring the Helpline from the office and it should be sorted out. He rang. He failed the security check. Wrong address.

By this time he was crying, on his knees, practically chewing the carpet. The woman asked him if it had been like this for nearly three months. It had. She looked at him, took hold of his hand and said 'Special Circumstances', and went into the back, and fetched one of those forms you can only get by ordering over the phone. She said to fill it in and send it in again. He refused. She looked at him. Special circumstances. She made an appointment for him to come in the next morning and she would process it.

The next morning, she put the information into the computer, and told him to give it 48 hours then ring the Helpline to ask how and when the money would be paid in. The moral of this story is- they *can* help you at the tax office. When you go in, don't be

angry, don't be aggressive (I had been half-expecting a call from the police). Just weep, fall to your knees, convulse on the carpet before them, and if you are lucky enough to find yourself before a person with a scrap of humanity- *they are able to help you.*

"I want to go away and study everything...said in today's debate....I was concerned about and am interested to learn the extent to which people find the process so difficult that they decline to renew and let their claim lapse."

Jane Kennedy

Karen, East Sussex:

I received a tax credit overpayment pay slip asking for £2706.12 back. On 6th April 2006, I moved in with my partner and so changed from a single to a joint claim. I rang them on 8th April 2006 and told them the changes as soon as the move took place. I was told it would be dealt with. Then I was sent a new tax credit award notice and found that my address had been changed but where was my partner??!!! I rang them again to ask for it to be changed. I was also told that my partners' details were on the system but they just hadn't done anything about it. It took them from April to July before they stopped the payments and started the joint claim. As a result they are now asking for the £2706.12 back. I don't have that sort of money and I don't work any more, as I had to give it up after having my little boy, as I could not afford the nursery fees and couldn't get help with it. I would have been working for nothing.

Even though it was their fault, I feel they are blaming me. They wanted me to pay back £250 a month. In desperation I suggested £50, to the shock of an HMRC member of staff who after working out my income and expenditure could see they equalled and I had no money left to afford anything at all. I have been having sleepless nights over it and my health has been affected as I have a long-term illness that has been made worse by the worry of all of this.

I disputed recovery of this overpayment, but received another request for payment. I rang their offices to be told that there was a letter explaining why it was fully recoverable, on the system but it had not been issued!!!! I couldn't get a copy of this letter although they are still saying the overpayment is fully recoverable due to household income!!!! What the hell are they doing? My head is all over the place. I'm sure they don't know what they are doing with anything. Guess what?? I received the original letter a month later!!!!

I received the letter; HMRC reckoned it was not their mistake although due to a 'computer error' none of my records were updated with all the dates and other information. Hold on a mo, they had my new address!!!! And when I had my little boy, they changed that quick enough. I had kept ringing them trying to sort it out, and they still kept paying me even when I kept telling them things had changed. They even received a new joint claim form signed by my partner and myself in June and that wasn't dealt with either!! They received this form on 8th June 2006 but this was not even dealt with until I had to ring them again on 10th July 2006!!!! I received a letter in January 2008 claiming that I didn't inform them of the changes until 10th July 2006.

My MP wrote to the Head of Operations regarding my case, and got a letter back explaining their reasons why it was an overpayment. In this letter HMRC claimed I didn't

tell them until 12th July 2006 that I had moved in with my partner. But the initial award notice was sent 10th July 2006 and they had cancelled my single claim on 9th July 2006. Yet their earlier letter stated that I had told them this on time, in 8th April 2006. This earlier letter also claimed that the initial award notice was not done until 14th July 2006. Due to the computer error nothing was actually cancelled till later.

My MP is more than happy to support me, but is stuck as every time they write to him, they tell him a different story, all with different dates!!!! I am waiting for copies of my phone calls so that I can prove that none of this was my fault.

I have received copies of the SARN documents I requested which shows in there that I rang on this date. I don't understand it when I have paperwork showing, and HMRC admitting, that I told them on 8th April 2006 why it is still my fault for the overpayment?

"About two million of the seven million people entitled to claim working tax credit and child tax credit do not do so. The complexity of the system...has left it beset by problems and has hit take-up...a serious setback for Mr Brown's ambition to halve the number of children in poverty by the end of the decade."
The Times

Emanuele, – Ashford:

My experience with Tax Credits has been and still is dreadful. It has affected my psychological well-being (I have been on antidepressants for the past year), my health (I have trouble sleeping and have been getting panic attacks) and my family life. In spite of sharing my on-going problem over the past 5 years with my company's Director of Finance, the Citizens Advice Bureau and now my M.P., there has been no progress made whatsoever and no solution seems yet at hand.

I am a French divorced mother-of-two who came to the U.K to work full-time at the end of September 2002; I claimed for the first time in January 2003. With hindsight, I should never ever have got in touch with the Inland Revenue. 5 years later, I am getting deeper into debt every year because of overpayments – and I don't even own a credit card!

I have received:

- Letters from the TCO thanking me for telling them about changes in circumstances when I had not done anything and when no change had happened;
- Personal data which included information on my ex-partner's previous wife (that's how I learned he was two-timing me!)
- forms with the award for the year that I was asked to confirm; when I did, I received several others with a wrong amount – I had to give the same information 6 times until my M.P. intervened – and the Tax Credit Office (TCO) said I had given the information too late.

I found the whole communication and correspondence extremely hard:

- Over the phone, it is difficult for me to understand what is said or make my point; I have also had to deal with people on the hotline who maintained things ("you did not declare that you started working on the 2/10/2006") when I had the proof beside me that it was definitely what I had written – but how to prove it?

- In writing: apart from being able to keep trace of what you send, the communication does not improve with letters. The questions asked are not answered, the data is not / partly / incorrectly entered in the system – and then a few months later you are told you did not give the information.

My M.P., Mr. Damian Green in Ashford, acted as a mediator between the TCO and myself to try to have an explanation; he did get detailed replies that obviously took some liberty with the truth, such as:

"Mrs - never phoned us to inform us of the changes" [first TCO letter sent to the MP]- (I wrote several letters)

"Mrs - wrote to inform us that her income was reduced to £1502.11" (I wrote various times giving my correct income).

"Mrs - phoned us on the 22nd April 2003" (following TCO letter sent to the MP dated 17.04.08).

The whole system is unfair:

You have to declare a provisional income – but it is not taken into account, the TCO's calculation remains based on the previous year's income i.e. if your income has gone up, you know you will end up with an overpayment.

When every other public body is concerned about communicating in plain English, the TCO expects you to understand complex forms and spot the mistakes.

They are judge and jury – which guarantees a very partial treatment of your file
If you live with a partner who pays maintenance for a previous wife and children, you still declare his total gross income – and not what he actually contributes towards your household. (Yet you meet other couples like you and learn that they only declare the actual contribution by the partner, having been told by the TCO to declare him as a "lodger".)

The way the TCO doesn't acknowledge any error on their behalf is enough to make you feel guilty, paranoid and incessantly wondering what on earth you have done wrong and getting more and more confused into a massive exchange of letters and forms. You do not feel listened to or respected. Trying to communicate with the TCO is like talking to a brick wall that you know will collapse and crush you.

After a while, you start hyperventilating when you see an HMRC envelope on your doorstep.

The tax credits have contributed in a few years in bringing my family on the edge of poverty or more - I am in overdraft from the 15th of each month onwards. I have a huge debt to repay through no fault of mine, and it is increasing every year. In 2008, the amount I am asked to repay may reach a figure above that of my annual net income.

I am no longer sure I can meet my teenage sons' needs and education and feel I am failing them as a parent. This on-going battle is like harassment and I feel extremely low and hopeless.

"How an Amnesty could be funded: `research from unbiased.co.uk, which represents independent financial advisors, shows unclaimed tax credits now stand at £3.6 billion." www.myfinances.co.uk

Sarah, Rotherham:

I first claimed Tax Credit when I returned to work on a part time basis when my son started full-time school, late 2000. I was only able to work part time due to childcare and was only able to do this because of the introduction of Tax Credit as I was a single parent.

I held a couple of part time posts before joining the Council in a job share position in October 2002. In February 2004 I changed posts and moved to full time employment, still with the Council. As I was still claiming Tax Credits I contacted HMRC when I was offered the position to enquire as to the effect this would have on the Tax Credits payments I received. I was told that even with the increase in income I would still be entitled to Tax Credits, but that they could not, at that time, tell me how much; I would have to provide them with the details once I was in the new post and my income changed.

I duly contacted the Tax Credits office on 09.02.04 to advise that I had increased my hours from 18.5 to 37 hours per week and gave details of the increase in salary. I have a copy of this phone call and the advisor clearly says that she will make the relevant amendments to my income so that I receive the correct payments.

In Spring 2004 and 2005 I duly submitted new applications for Tax Credits along with P60s for each preceding financial year and in return received the deluge of papers that everyone claiming Tax Credits is used to.

On 10.05.05 I received correspondence to advise I had been overpaid Tax Credits. Since then I have been told that the overpayment was because I stopped using a child minder, because I got married and because I had not advised of a change in income in February 2004. The amounts I owe have also changed repeatedly but seem to be somewhere between £485 and £3,314-07.

I have been told by HMRC that I cannot appeal repaying this money; forms and information will be sent to me (never received and I had to ask multiple times); I have had HMRC staff hang up on me when I ask questions they cannot answer; received frequent letters demanding immediate repayment of the various sums and repeatedly contacted the Revenue to advise I had an ongoing appeal; threats of debt collectors being sent; and threats of court – including Sheriff's Court which does not exist in England! This last threat arrived on 24.01.07 and gave me until 26.01.07 to pay in full.

HMRC continue to give conflicting information and inaccurate information to my MP and to me; they continue to not acknowledge queries raised with them and continue to fail to address issues with my claim.

I wish I no longer received tax credit payments, but have not yet found a way of exiting the system that does not instantly generate an overpayment I would be forced to repay.

"Disputed claims of improving accuracy: an anomaly in the tax credit statistics...shows that although 97% of tax credit awards are processed accurately, only 40% of payments are in fact correct." www.litr.org.uk

Heulwen, Storrington:

I have been putting off sharing my case ... afraid of reopening the wounds of what HMRC did to me over the last 5 years. They created a dreadful situation for me. It is not about getting even, but putting things right, and sharing my experience so others may have encouragement and support.

My fiasco with HMRC and tax credits began when they had the problem with their computers not functioning. Because of this, for 4 months I received no tax credits at all. As a single mother of 2, I found this incredibly difficult to manage. This seemed to resolve itself later in the year and they advised they would pay me via my bank account, rather than via my employer. I found out later that HMRC had been sending information about how to pay me to the wrong company, and had not used the correct address I had given them.

In 2004/2005 I received a constant stream of letters from HMRC. One would advise me that I had been awarded x amount, to be followed 2 weeks later by another contradicting this. They claimed I had not sent in my review/declaration, but I had.

During 2004 I filled in a simple, user-friendly online declaration and received a reference number to prove that I had sent this in. I (wrongly) assumed all was in order. I received about 4 letters, 2 weeks apart, all advising different amounts of awards. I honestly could not make any sense of the award letters and so I called them for advice. I was advised I was no longer entitled to tax credits as my salary was over their threshold and my daughter was no longer a dependent. This was wrong, as she was still at home and at 6th form college, so I gave them her child benefit number so that they could cross-reference that for proof. They apologised and said they would send me another letter with the correct amount.

They did, but it was so inconsistent: different amounts each and every letter. I was so confused I did not know what to believe. I left them to get on with it and then received a letter demanding that I send in my declaration, warning that as I had not done so I was breaking the law and my tax credits would be stopped. I rang them immediately and spoke to someone who was most apologetic and admitted that they had got it wrong. He advised me to send in a dispute, as he was unable to help me directly.

I sent in this dispute and received a letter saying that they had received it and would get back in touch with me. I heard nothing for several months and then in April 2005, the letters recommenced with different award amounts on them and sometimes showing an income from when I had worked for my previous employer (I had left in September 2003 and had advised all changes). I received one letter saying that they had updated my account and the amount of salary showing was a staggering £0! I could not believe they had got that wrong when I had actually spoken to someone and amended my salary.

About 3 weeks later I received 5 giro cheques from HMRC advising me that they owed me £1595. I did not spend the money as I felt it didn't tally in with everything else they had been advising over the last few months, and put them aside.

2 weeks later another letter came saying that I had been awarded x amount based on a salary of x amount and it all seemed okay... so far so good I thought. But what about these giro cheques? I called them again and was advised that I should not have been sent them as they had not calculated my salary correctly, as I HAD NOT SENT IN MY DECLARATION! With that I hit the roof. I had been through all this with them before!

I was advised that I would need to fill in *another* dispute form as they did not have my previous dispute showing on their screen. When I asked why they did not have any information from my previous phone calls or letters, they could only waffle on about how different departments put different information on the screens and different departments deal with things in different ways. They have no transparency as an organisation.

I was then put through to another department where I explained my whole case history. I was told that the cheques were not mine, and they inferred that I had obtained them by deceit, as though I had stolen them by giving them incorrect information! I felt I was banging my head against a wall. I was at my wits end with them with each phone call and letter just serving to further confuse them and frustrate me.

I refused to send the cheques back by post, as with their track record for losing things I did not trust to get them to the right department and log them as returned. It was eventually agreed that I could return them to a Revenue office in Worthing and have them receipted by someone who already knew about my situation. How stupid of me to think that they would get that right. When I got there, no-one knew about me. After further explanations I watched the Revenue officer enter each and every cheque onto her PC and put them for posting. This was in May 2005.

Then a barrage of threatening letters began to arrive, stating I owed £359, which I had to pay immediately. I found they had the wrong employment details, which they blamed me for giving. Now why would I do that? What useful purpose could that have had? I would not have had my payments from them if they were sent to the wrong employer! They advised they could not read my writing... odd that as it was typed. Hmmm... the mind boggles.

By the time this was going on in 2005 I was working in stressful job, and with constant threats about money being owed to the Revenue, it is a wonder I did not have a complete breakdown - I was very close to one. The solicitor handling my divorce advised me that the government were writing off these debts and that I was not going to have to repay them, so this was not taken into consideration in my financial settlement for my divorce.

During 2005 and 2006 I received several letters advising I owed them money but the amounts varied between £359 to £4,600!!! Each letter demanded the money be paid or action would be taken against me. Each time I received a letter I would call them and ask what it was about. How had it reached £2600 when it had been £359 a few weeks before? How it had then dropped to £1200? And then finally the straw that broke the camel's back was in June 2006.

I was just returning home from work, looking forward to a birthday meal with friends and my partner (now my ex, as the stress I was under did not help). I was shocked to open a letter from a Debt Recovery company demanding £4,600. I rang them straight away and spoke to a very helpful and sympathetic young woman who seemed embarrassed at the atrocities that were going on. I told her she was far too nice for a job like this and she should get out. She said, "You know, I think you are right." I hope for her sake, she did get out. I was sobbing on the phone by this time, as I did not know what this was all about. She told me to ring HMRC direct and gave me a number to call.

I spoke to another woman, who caused me further despair by demanding I pay this money or be taken to court. She said that if I took the tack that I was not going to pay it, I would go to prison. I told her that she could take me to prison then, as I was not going to pay it, as I knew I did not owe it to them. She advised me that I had not sent in my last 2 declarations (wrong); that I had not sent in a dispute form (I did two); that I had delayed returning money that they had sent to me by mistake, and had sent it to the wrong department (WRONG!!!) When I pointed out that her colleagues were responsible for the cheques going to the wrong HMRC address and being delayed by 10 months, she denied this.

Unfortunately towards the end of the call, I was sobbing and almost incoherent. I told her I was not going to pay them any money when I knew I did not owe it to them. She then advised that if I paid £2000 immediately, this would leave the arrears of £2600 to pay, which I could probably arrange to do via a payment plan. I asked why had I got to pay £2000 now, and she told me this was a PENALTY charged against me for non-payment of the other amount! I told her that none of what she said or her organisation said made any sense and so I was not going to pay this unless they could prove beyond all shadow of a doubt that I owed it to them. I asked to speak to her supervisor or someone in charge and she refused to put me through to anyone. She was unbelievably rude and cold. Ironically, her name was Hope.

It was from this point of despair that I sought help from the Tax Credit Casualties. I was advised to contact my MP. In January 2007, I received a letter from him advising me that they had looked at my case and that I did still owe £2600. HMRC were sorry for problems caused and sent me a cheque for £75. I continued to dispute this.

In August 2007, out of the blue, I received a letter from HMRC advising they were looking into my case along with others to ensure that everything was conducted correctly and they would write to me in due course to advise me what I should do. 2 weeks later I received another letter demanding that I pay back £2600 immediately or set up a payment plan. I was puzzled: one letter stated they were looking at my case, whilst another threatened me with court action if I refused to pay up!

I rang the recovery agency and spoke to a helpful young man, who said that I was not the only one this had happened to, that he and his colleagues had dealt with many 'blip in the system' cases like mine, and advised me to do sit and wait.

Finally in January 2008 I was told an error had been made and that I had not owed them anything except £130, some of which they had already 'taken at source' (really... where ???). They told me I now only owe them £51, after they had 'let me off' with £30 as a means of compensation. I think they owe me more than £51 in time, effort, phone bills, and the untold anguish and anxiety they caused me and my family.

During 2007, my relationship ended with my partner, on top of fighting this case, and was a major personal difficulty in my life; I nearly buckled under the strain. It is because I know the battle for justice has to be fought that I am here now, backing up anyone else undermined by HMRC and their farcical manner of business structure.

Postscript:

Having been told in January 2008 that my overpayment was finally written off, three months later I received a letter from HMRC advising me of legal proceedings as I have apparently still to pay the £2598.62, which they say they have written about previously. I wrote to my MP begging him to tell me what is going on, as I cannot bear this any longer! I am nearly in tears here this morning as I write, worrying about these idiots.

THIS HAS GOT TO BE RESOLVED ONCE AND FOR ALL! PLEASE! These are people's lives and emotional health, not National Insurance numbers, pieces of paper or sums on a blackboard, but real people who are being deeply affected by the gross incompetency of this organisation.

"Sometimes there is the insinuation that those who mistakenly received overpayments were fraudulent, too. The vast majority were not, and Mr Brown should make this crystal clear..." The Times

Liz, Chichester:

I first contacted the Child Tax Credit in 2003. It seemed to be a Godsend and I happily received the money each month and was able to budget money much better and was able to support my family much better. This extra money soon got swallowed up. We didn't seem to have any extra money but it just made our lives easier.

I started to fill in my application by phone and this is where my problems started.

I was misadvised and Tax Credits were still paid to me even though I had questioned whether my daughter was still eligible at 19 and was not given a satisfactory answer.

The payments still kept coming and so I assumed that I was still eligible for payments. It was a complete shock to learn that the Tax Credit Office said that I owed them over a year in overpayments, because of their mistake...

I have had this awful upset and worry now for nearly a year and I am still fighting my case. I have been threatened and bullied by the Tax Credit Office and if it hadn't been for the Tax Credit Casualties, I'd probably have been in Court by now.

"I was not convinced that in reaching their decisions, staff were giving proper weight to the obligation that there should be on HMRC to get things right and give customers accurate and reliable awards." www.ombudsman.org.uk

Tracy, Gosforth:

Where do I go, what do I do? This worry about tax credit overpayment is making me ill.

I received a letter from HM Revenue and Customs recently saying they are looking into my Child Tax Credit as they say there is an overpayment. I'm a single mum with 3 children. Two were on Disability Living Allowance but my daughter's ended and I rang the Tax Credit Office (TCO). They tell me they have no record of this call though.

This year when the renewal came through I just signed and sent it back, as there were no changes to my circumstances. I didn't check it thoroughly (more fool me) as I had just lost my grandmother, then 5 weeks later, my mum. My head wasn't working right, unfortunately. I had always been honest with them, and wasn't on the look out for their mistakes.

I have had a letter from the TCO asking for my P60, all household bills, payslips, DLA forms for the children, mortgage statements etc., as though it was my own fault, when I did nothing wrong.

I am now frightened that they will stop all my tax credits. If they do, we won't be able to live and will end up having to sell the house so I can feed the kids. I'm just so lost. Honestly, I've never been through anything like this before in my life.

When I phoned the TCO, the man on the telephone told me that my overpayment had to be paid back within a year, but at that time told me he wasn't able to tell me the amount.

He told me just to look at it as a second mortgage! I think he was *trying* to comfort me.

It's got me so worried I really do feel quite sick.

When I phoned the TCO, the man on the telephone told me that my overpayment had to be paid back within a year, but at that time told me he wasn't able to tell me the amount.

"The Chairman of HMRC agreed they are committed to 'working increasingly closely with...agents, representatives of organisations that speak for the unrepresented'. This is very welcome, if the close working is done in partnership mode and in advance, rather than consulting after we have already decided what we want to do." www.litrg.org.uk

Nick, Hertford:

We are sick and tired of HMRC's long delays and repeated failures to provide information, update our income properly, send out and process our renewal form, act according to CoP26, and properly answer our letters. HMRC have repeatedly ignored or denied any errors, and instead have sent tardy, irrelevant, cut and paste replies, making no effort to actually read and respond to the issues. HMRC repeatedly gave us incorrect information, e.g. inappropriately requesting deductions for Statutory Maternity Pay which resulted in our income figure being skewed downwards, Tax Credits being calculated on the wrong income, and overpayments that are entirely HMRC's fault. HMRC also attempted to charge us £100 for their inappropriate and failed Court case in April 2007. I was fortunate to get advice from Tax Credit Casualties beforehand and successfully got further Court action adjourned.

Right from the start HMRC misleadingly advertised Tax Credits as "Money with your name on it", using words such as "secure" and "guaranteed". The Treasury Press Release dated 13/09/02 promises: *"Up to £2 billion pounds will be transferred from fathers to mothers - providing them and their children with a secure and regular source of income"* and *"The campaign idea, 'It's Money With Your Name On It', is intended to motivate people to claim their entitlement. In other words, they are entitled to this money in recognition of their contribution to the UK - through bringing up children, or working. So, the money is rightfully theirs and they should make sure they claim"*.

HMRC knew that the inherent design of the new system involved provisional payments and overpayments, yet made no efforts to explain in literature or advertising that the scheme was fundamentally different to the previous system. Instead they misadvertised these as guaranteed, secure entitlements. As a popular idiom, if something is described as "having your name on it" it means that "we saved this one for you, it is yours", e.g. "There's a steak on the barbecue and it has your name on it" (or "there's a bullet with your name on it", which seems a more appropriate analogy given the grief HMRC has caused us). We were told it was money that we were entitled to. How could we have known that HMRC meant: "this money might be yours, we'll give it to you but you might or might not have to give some or all of it back years later"? Or: "There's a steak on the grill with your name on it. We are deliberately giving it specifically to you but after you've eaten it we'll ask for it back"? Given that millions of other Tax Credit claimants interpreted "Money with your name on it" in exactly the same way, the onus should be on HMRC to prove otherwise.

Tax Credits would have been better described as "Money which *might* have your name on it, if we ever get our systems right" or, in millions of cases, "Tax Credits: Huge painful debt with your name on it (with a County Court Judgment if you can't repay)".

Unbelievably, HMRC had already estimated that 1 million claimants would be overpaid in the first year and would be chased to make repayments. ("The Child and Working Tax Credits - The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System", April 2002). Knowing

this, HMRC failed to make any efforts to overcome this or to provide accurate and relevant information or warnings to claimants in advertising or literature. This is surely Corporate Negligence?

Following the mass of confusion, overpayments, and complaints resulting from HMRC's misinformation, countless well-respected bodies, organisations and charities produced formal documents criticising the information output and systems set up of Tax Credits by HMRC, including:

Citizens Advice Bureaux, e.g. their report "Money with your name on it?"
The Parliamentary Ombudsman "Putting Things Right", "Getting it Wrong"
The Public Accounts Committee
The Low Income Tax Reform Group
The Child Poverty Action Group

As a result, HMRC were forced to set up a Tax Credits Consultation Group with representatives from the CAB, LITRG etc to attempt to improve the quality of their information output because it was so bad. Virtually every week there's a new story about Tax Credit maladministration, yet unbelievably, even after HMRC's mistakes and shortfalls have been publicly exposed and criticised, they still try to pin the blame for their inadequacies on claimants.

HMRC have proven themselves to be incompetent, unaccountable, wasteful of tax payers money, arrogant, patronising, inefficient, and having no regard for claimants.

My partner, Lisa, together with other Tax Credit Casualties, met with senior officials at HMRC at 100 Parliament Street on 12th June 2007. At this meeting, attended by Tracy Gale, David Skinner, Christine Fox and other Tax Credits Policy Advisors from HMRC, and representatives of the Tax Credit Casualties organisation, Tracy Gale admitted that no effort had been made, in terms of the application and renewal forms, to minimise overpayments. HMRC agreed that their instructions around SMP were causing problems and they are "looking into it". HMRC should be warning mothers who have been on maternity leave that their past year's income might be lower than predicted future year's income, and should be facilitating a way to minimise future overpayments, not exacerbate them. Tax Credit helplines were so jammed that work was outsourced to external call centres and we have confirmation from Tracy Gale and other HMRC representatives that not all calls were recorded. In general, the system was in a state of chaos.

In our own case it appears that, following months of advertising guaranteed payments, eleven A4 pages of application forms specifically requesting old and modified income information, numerous pages of guidance notes, four A4 pages of Award Notices, and many months later, what HMRC were expecting us to take action on was one ambiguous, inaccurate, sentence, in tiny 9 point print, tucked in the middle of the Award Notice, saying "...or goes above £17,400.00 as you may receive too much tax credit and we may ask you to pay back the amount overpaid". This was so well hidden HMRC might as well have displayed this notice "in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying *beware of the leopard*."

Originally HMRC used a completely inappropriate and unworkable £2,500 income disregard; to try to reduce future overpayments they made a massive increase in the income disregard from £2,500 to £25,000 – but this was not backdated. The change

proves that the original system and salary disregard was unrealistic and unworkable. It also proves that HMRC currently considers that overpayments to households where income has increased up to £25,000 from the income used to calculate the award are not worth collecting back by HMRC on behalf of the taxpayer. So in other words, if the same circumstances of our claim were repeated today, HMRC would not be chasing the overpayments. How can HMRC claim they are chasing these earlier overpayments to protect the public purse?

I am, quite clearly, being unfairly penalised twice - being both a victim of the original mistakes and teething problems of Tax Credits, and also not being allowed to benefit from subsequent common sense corrections of HMRC's earlier mistakes and errors of judgement. Why should these old overpayments have to be paid back to HMRC when, if the same income increase happened now, it would simply be ignored?

Had we (and millions of others like us) known at the time that the Tax Credit payments were provisional, and based on irrelevant figures (erroneously skewed by HMRC), and that the resultant, almost guaranteed overpayments would have to be repaid via harsh demands and Court appearances, then undoubtedly we would not have claimed or spent the Tax Credit payments and therefore denied our children the fresh food, clothes, shoes and educational toys that the Tax Credits payments enabled us to buy, for fear of HMRC heavy-handedly demanding them back.

This has all cost us a great deal of time and expense and stress. As a result our health and family life have suffered. Is that what Gordon Brown wanted?

"In revising a decision, the officer or person in question need not consider any issue that is not raised by the application for revision by the claimant or claimants or, as the case may be, did not cause him to act on his own initiative." HMRC Manual

Sylvia, Hampshire.

* For 3 consecutive years HMRC got our tax credits wrong. Despite completing the forms with honest information, we are saddled with a demand for over £6000!

* HMRC seem to be accountable to no one but themselves, we are all treated as guilty until proven innocent!

* The system is too complicated and impossible to work out for ourselves to see if the award given is right or wrong. How can it be reasonable for us to know if it IS right or wrong?

* This system DOES NOT WORK - why won't HMRC and Gordon Brown hold their hands up and admit it?

* 'Write off' ALL overpayment demands - it is causing stress, worry and misery to honest law abiding citizens. A year ago I didn't have Multiple Sclerosis. Now I have, stress being one of the contributing factors !

* Please LISTEN to us, we can't ALL be wrong !

"I asked 'how many payments of child tax credit have involved overpayment because of a failure by HMRC to record the return of an annual declaration?' but got the answer 'There should be no overpayments arising because of a failure by HMRC to record the return of an annual declaration.' Typical evasion!" Birmingham Post

Cheryl, Hertfordshire:

My partner was advised by HMRC that he was entitled to tax credit and was awarded this in 2003/2004. He then received a letter in this tax period and was advised he wasn't entitled to it. He called the offices of HMRC and was advised that it was a mistake on their behalf and he was entitled to it. The payments continued.

His circumstances changed in 2005 and he advised HMRC of this. He then received another letter advising him that he had been overpaid for 2003/2004. He called the office again and was advised that they would look into it and never heard anything back.

24th May 2007 - two years later - he received a threatening letter to pay £2800 otherwise action will be taken legally.

We have sent many letters:

12 June 2007 - to initially appeal. We received a letter saying that if we didn't pay they would take legal action.

20th July 2007 - we wrote a SARN letter asking for data held.

August 2007 - we received the printouts of data from their system and were advised the CD was on its way.

15 December 2007 - Letter from HMRC to say we owed £2791.68 and that they 'have already told us we owe them money and that under Section 29(3) we must pay it back by 14 January 2008 and if it is not made they will commence enforcement proceedings'.

10 January 2008 - I have sent a further dispute letter.

Why tell us he was entitled and then threaten us with court?

"Constituents are very frightened when faced with a Tax Credit demand. Some constituents have told me when they receive a letter from Tax Credits they are too frightened to open it and ask a friend to come around and open it on their behalf." Daniel Kawczynski MP

Sammy, Sheffield.

I was issued a court summons on 1st December 2006 for an alleged tax credit overpayment. I turned up in court on the appointed date, but HMRC failed to produce evidence and asked for an adjournment, which was granted. The hearing was adjourned because HMRC did not have all the 'facts together'. I was not allowed to object to the adjournment and had taken a day off work for nothing. Yet it was HMRC who took me to court. Three years down the line they still did not have facts together, yet a further 6-weeks adjournment was granted without question.

Just before I was due to appear in court again on 27th March 2007, I got a call from the Revenue explaining that they still had not got their facts together and would be asking

the judge for a further adjournment. The caller said that I didn't need to turn up in court the following week, for the Revenue would explain my absence to the judge. I chose to turn up, feeling rather surprised and suspicious that the Revenue could just call and say the case would be adjourned without first consulting the judge.

At the second hearing, the Revenue explained to the judge why the previous hearing was adjourned, stating that they now had 'facts' and would be looking for a judgment. I complained to the judge that the Revenue had called asking me not to bother attending, but the Revenue dismissed this as waiting for documents which had only just arrived.

I started to describe to the judge why the letter which HMRC had sent to my MP Mr Blunkett had all the facts wrong, which I was prepared to prove. The judge stopped me, saying 'Mr xxxx, let me explain to you. I am sorry there is nothing I can do. HMRC have the Certificate of Debt. Once this certificate is shown I will award judgment. The Revenue has produced this document today. Nothing you have will make any difference whatsoever. I'm sorry.' This was how I discovered that the 'facts' which the Revenue had forced an adjournment for were in fact a simple document - a 'Certificate of Debt' that could be presented to the judge. My argument was never heard nor even asked for in court. I was also denied access to a duty solicitor. So a certificate served by the Revenue themselves ensured that the Revenue won, with no challenge possible by me. Rather than having 'my day in court' to show an impartial judge that I should not be forced to pay money back which the Revenue had overpaid me by their own errors, once the Revenue take a claimant to court, the claimant cannot win no matter what evidence they bring to court with them. Even a sympathetic judge, it seems, is powerless to act.

I found this quote from the Independent on 9th December 2007:

When the principles of justice become inconvenient, they are easily forgotten. To decide a case fairly, a judge must hear both sides of the argument and each side must know the arguments that the other has made. This might seem obvious. "I cannot at the moment visualise any circumstances", said Lord Donaldson the former Master of the Rolls, "in which it would be right to give a judge information not disclosed to the other side." That was how it seemed in 1983.

The Human Rights Act affirms the "right to a fair hearing". And a fair hearing, according to the European Court of Human Rights, demands that each party must hear all the evidence and arguments from the other side. There are exceptions borne of necessity national security may make disclosure impossible. But these are rare and extreme cases.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/comment/expert-view-justice-is-the-loser-as-the-taxman-insists-on-tribunal-secrecy-763909.html>

If the Revenue say you owe money, then you do, no matter what the actual facts are. I have been misled by the Revenue and the justice system. Why should I pay what I do not owe? We were given 14 days to pay full the amount back.

To me, the whole system is corrupt beyond belief. The judge will not offer advice and is not expected to do so. The Revenue is beyond normal rule of law. Basically, if you do not win your internal Revenue appeal, you have lost - nothing you can do about it.

The court stuff is a cover, for once they have the 'certificate' you have lost. This was never made clear to us, though the judge implied we lost internal Revenue 'appeals'.

"I want it on record - most claimants are honest." Dawn Primarolo MP

Jennifer, Jarrow:

The Tax Credit Casualties website and forum is amazing. It is so good to know that we can support each other.

I am currently disputing an overpayment for the tax year 2003/04. At the end of 2007 I requested and received my data from the Tax Credit Office. However I have been ill since then and the last thing I felt like doing was to go through what looked like a pile of gobbledegook. This week I have received a Notice warning of legal proceedings. There is no indication of what year they are talking about just them telling me that if payment in full is not made they will commence enforcement proceedings.

Enforcement proceedings are supposed to be a last resort, and I am writing to them reminding them that the dispute is still ongoing.

Going through the data now, I have already found 2 pages that belong to someone else showing all their details! This just proves to me how sloppy they are. I only hope that none of my data has been sent to someone else by mistake as these days you never know what might happen.

If they can't even look after our personal data properly, now can they work out our awards correctly?

"Ministers are aware that some lobby groups and claimants have recommended that there should be a tax credit overpayment amnesty...I am unable to go into further detail about the matters covered, however, as discussions between officials and Ministers are confidential." Tracy Gale, Directort, Tax Credit Policy

Martyn & Sally, Clanfield:

Between April 03 and June 04 we received an average of £43 per month, then in late June 04 we suddenly received four additional payments in two days, totalling over £2000. From that point onwards we received cheques for anything from £143 to five or six hundred pounds, with a payment of over £2500 for April 2005.

Each time the payments ramped up we contacted the Helpline to make them aware – probably about five times. They would then ask us to fill in another set of forms, which we duly did. Adjustments were made, but the level of payment received was still considerably higher than the early payments of approximately £40 per month.

On a couple of occasions we were 'reassured' that all was OK, on the basis that they had looked at the case so many times that these payments *must* be correct. Believing that we had done the right thing by HMRC, and having received notification of the new payment level, we naturally started to accept that all was as it should be.

In February 2006 we suddenly received notification that we had been overpaid £617 for 2004-2005. We paid this back promptly, believing that we owed it due to the original higher payments and adjustments.

In early 2007 we received another notification that we had been overpaid £1,731.74!

In response to this, we wrote a 'determined' letter to the Overpayment Team requesting a statement, along with other questions as to how this new amount had been arrived at. Along with this letter we returned our uncompleted annual declaration on the basis that we would complete it when they provided the information we required.

After waiting four months we eventually received a not very helpful reply, and many of the other things we had asked about had been ignored. We then received another demand to return our annual declaration, to which I responded with a copy of my original letter explaining why I was not completing the form. On 16th December we received a further letter demanding the declaration back by 14th December!

At this point I contacted the Helpline, only to be rather gleefully told by an arrogant, heard-it-all-before assistant that I should repay the £1,731.74 at once, as in 2008 they would be asking me to pay back £10,658.81! Needless to say, we were distraught at this news and are now challenging the claw-back.

We have tried to handle this on our own, with no help from HMRC. We can never talk to the same person twice, and are going round in circles.

We have never refused outright to pay the money back to HMRC but this would be very difficult as we would need to borrow the money to do so. With both of us being 61 and my wife already retired, who in the present financial climate would see us as anything other than a bad risk?

However, as a starting point, we feel it is only right that HMRC should be forthcoming in helping us understand why this has gone so badly wrong, especially given that we were in touch with HMRC on so many occasions trying to tell them something must be wrong, only to be assured all was OK. More to the point how do we know that they are correct, especially as they seem to be above the law themselves?

Like so many others, we have never knowingly misinformed HMRC or made a fraudulent claim. The information we gave HMRC must be correct as most of it came from HMRC's own tax statements. We reported all Changes of Circumstances to them within a reasonable amount of time.

At one stage – April 05 – we were investigated by the HMRC fraud people accusing us of supplying incorrect income information, but after several nerve racking weeks HMRC admitted that it was due to their entering our data incorrectly and we were cleared of any wrongdoing.

At a loss as to what to do next, we contacted Tax Credit Casualties and we have supported their local regional meetings. We would like an independent body to review our case.

It seems that HMRC is more interested in getting the money back than putting things right. At one stage we even went to HMRC in Portsmouth, where we met a very pleasant and helpful lady who informed us that they don't handle tax credits. However,

she invited us to explain our problem, and I was happy to tell her. She gave us a nice smile and rather shyly said: "I wish you luck. I know how you feel – I am in the same position myself!"

The Department seeks to recover overpayments wherever possible. It can only write-off the debt or restrict the rate of recovery if it considers that repayment would cause hardship. It can also write-off overpayments which result from official error or if it finds these are due to organised fraud. Public Accounts Committee

Denise, Worcester:

My saga began at the end of July last year when after correctly filling out the annual review, our award notice arrived wrongly showing that I had an income of £0.00. I rang the Tax Credit Office (TCO) immediately to tell them this was wrong. I was unable to give them exact figures as I was recovering from recent surgery, using a wheelchair, and I did not have this paperwork to hand. Since my income barely changes from one year to the next, I explained to the adviser that I was giving her the previous year's figures which would be roughly the same. She insisted that she wanted the exact figures, but I told her that I could not give these and that they had already got the correct information on the form I had sent.

We thought nothing more about this until my husband began receiving endless giros. He immediately rang the TCO to check they were ours, explaining the zeroing of my salary and my earlier call. Not only were we led to believe they were ours, but we were told to expect more! My husband was also told matter-of-factly that our award forms would go to Head Office. The TCO had sent us a letter (as they had many others) to say they were checking our original claim and we just assumed it was all to do with that.

When giros had arrived we had continually called to check we could have them, and even tried holding back £1300 just to be on the safe side, even though advisers insisted the money was ours. Eventually, after several phone calls and continually being told this money was ours to use, we spent the money on some large bills we had received.

In October we received another award notice showing an income of zero and rang again to point out their error. I clearly explained that they had all the correct income information that they needed.

Then out of the blue, in November 2007, I had a letter from the compliance team who were about to send us a "formal notification of a decision". The letter basically implied that I'd made a fraudulent claim. I rang to once again explain the TCO's multiple errors in recording my salary, how I had made several calls to correct this, and that I had done nothing wrong. The woman who wrote the letter was off that day and I spoke to someone else. Despite my explanations I was devastated by the woman's harsh and hostile retort: 'We'll see, won't we!' I came off the phone in floods of tears, knowing I had done nothing wrong yet feeling as though I was seen as a criminal.

I rang the writer of the letter, telling her I had been in a wheelchair when asked to provide exact figures, yet had been very clear that I was only able to provide close approximates, asking the adviser to refer back to my original review form for the actual

ones. I had never been told this was not possible. I can only think that the adviser failed to alter my income and allowed unnecessary problems to arise for us. I requested a copy of my original review form and it showed that I'd filled it in correctly, yet the computer system hadn't picked it up when it was scanned. I was told I would be sent out a new award notice to show my correct income.

The girl I dealt with was lovely (a rarity for the Tax Credit Office) and encouraged me to dispute, which I did. However, she herself made a mistake in recording my details on the new award notice and I had to phone again to get it put right.

The compliance investigation showed we had done nothing wrong, but we received no apology for being treated as though we had.

Our troubles were far from over, and we sent off a request for copies of all our telephone calls knowing that this would prove our efforts to ensure everything was right, and that the TCO's constant assurances that we were receiving our correct entitlement showed that we 'reasonably believed' our award correct.

I had to wait an excessive 100 days for the CDs to arrive. When I rang the Helpline to ask where the CDs were, the advisers were unable to give me any helpful information.

Despite making it clear that I didn't want my dispute concluded and a decision made until I had been able to receive and go through all my call records, this is exactly what the TCO did! I had my request to have my overpayment written off turned down "because I'd phoned to tell them of an increase in my income"! Yet I'd phoned them to tell them about their mistakes!

I rang the Overpayment team to find out why they refused to find in my favour when they were aware that I was waiting for transcripts of my calls to them. I had a particularly nasty girl on the phone. She raised her voice to me, and wouldn't let me get a word in edgeways. Every time I tried to speak to her, she would practically yell over me. She kept saying that I'd had the money and I'd got to pay it back, and that I knew it wasn't mine. Why did I keep phoning up, as there was no point? All I was doing was going over the same things. She was so angry with me that my husband, who was at the other side of the room at the time, could hear her yelling down the phone at me!

Her manner was bullying and unprofessional, and she left me in tears.

I had tried to explain to her that far from taking what wasn't mine, we'd actually kept some of the giros till they went out of date, but when we had a large bill in we sent them back and they reissued them, because they were still saying that they were ours and we could have them. She was having none of it. I'm still waiting to receive my call records, but I am not expecting that call to be supplied, as it really shows bullying tactics.

I got my MP involved, and he eventually got them to write off part of the overpayment, but I am still disputing recovery of £1100. I would not recommend tax credits to anyone, and it still makes me go cold when I see a letter from the TCO. This is common to all the tax credit victims I know.

I have had so many sleepless nights worrying over this. Fortunately, the Tax Credit Casualties' website www.taxCC.org is so clear and professional, and the team so

helpful, that I have found out more about my right to dispute than the TCO has ever cared to tell me. When your overpayment bill arrives they tell you 'you can not appeal', but fail to tell you that what we would call an appeal, they call a dispute.

I have painful rheumatoid arthritis and do not need all this additional stress and worry, which has affected my health. I have never known an organization like this one, which is always and only ever right, and tramples over people whatever they do.



Testimonies to TCC

LS.

Please pass on my grateful thanks to Paula and the rest of the 'guys', without their valuable help and calm advice I believe my marriage would have ended, I would have lost my home and the HMRC would have been 'nicking' the 'overpayment' by now. 'Thanks' does not quite cover it but I am sure they know how I feel.

JH.

THANK YOU from the heart for being there. You're a true ANGEL. Keep up the good work and hopefully our AMNESTY will be granted very soon.

Your Money Comments, Sunday Express

Over the last couple of months I have cried bucket fulls over the demands for overpayments, my husbands ill-health and this evening I cried because I found your site. I don't feel so despondent anymore YOU HAVE GIVEN ME HOPE- IN MY WORLD OF HOPELESSNESS. thank-you. The only real help I have had is from Paula and her team at www.taxCC.org Perhaps the government should fund the work they do to sort out this mess for them. Thanks, E.

HB.

I cannot thank you enough, don't know where to begin really. What can I say? Could not have coped without you. A million kisses and thanx.

TT.

I must say a big thank you to you and Paula for putting so much effort in to trying to help us all. It is nice to know we are not alone in our battle as sometimes it feels that way. We should not feel frightened to claim what is supposed to be there to help us.

KG.

Congratulations to you and Paula for truly standing up and fighting for what you believe in. There are precious few people like that around.

Anon

1 Tax Credit Casualties provide a service that no one else can or will. When the Government and the system fail individuals on low incomes, TCC are there to help.

2 TCC provide a website full of information. From the front page it is clear and straightforward to find the information needed...the National Coordinators are always willing to talk to victims and offer help and support.

3 Tax Credit Casualties were there when no one else was. HMRC - forget it. CAB - well, they're paid by the Government and have to toe the line.

4 After receiving an overpayment bill from HMRC out of the blue, from some years back and without any explanation, I was on my last legs. Up until that point, I had been recovering from a breakdown caused by the most tragic of family events. I regressed, and once again became suicidal and unable to cope.

5 Tax Credit Casualties were like a lighthouse in a hurricane. As well as being given sound guidance and a roadmap through the dispute process, the support received through their forum became a huge foundation of bedrock for me.

6 I fought HMRC over an alleged Tax Credit overpayment and won almost single handedly. The Citizens Advice Bureau at that time were as useful as the proverbial chocolate teapot.

7 Faced with the bureaucracy and red tape that "is" H.M.R.C my partner and I were sinking fast when presented with a large bill for an alleged overpayment of tax credits from years before. That was until we came across Tax Credit Casualties! The website is very informative, easy to use and guides you through the minefield set before you. The team behind it are selfless in their giving of time, expertise and support, all for no personal gain other than to see justice done in an unjust system.

8 I am in the process of trying to save myself from being destroyed by the TCO and this site is an absolute wealth of information invaluable to the layman. It has given me hope that I might come through this in one piece without being thrust into poverty by a system that was, in theory, there to help those who were struggling anyway!

9 * The operators are doing this for those in most need out of the kindness of their hearts (VOLUNTARY)

* They are saving people from the steamroller of the only unaccountable organisation left in Britain (the INLAND REVENUE)

* They are making a serious (as opposed to mildly interesting) impact on the lives of so many desperate people. God bless 'em.

10 Very helpful and free of charge.

J.

Oh Alison why am I still crying, a year on since became so ill as a result of long-term stress and anxiety caused by the tax credit system? Thanks for being there and caring... I pray every night that someone in Government will write off our debt...I found the Tax Credit Casualties website myself as the MP didn't know of any organisation other than the CAB.

AC.

Dear people - I'd like to say thank you for existing and for using your energy to make this website which I discovered 2 days ago...your website has given me a renewed sense of purpose...I received another letter saying I had been overpaid...I was plunged into panic, despair and stupefaction by all this...and cried over this situation.

LC.

I just wanted to share some fantastic news with you..... following your advice I wrote to my MP outlining my case, and he has just written to confirm that my outstanding overpayment of £9800 has been written off!...I would just like you to pass on my good news to others and tell them not to give up, try every possible avenue open to them...Thank you so much for all of your help and encouragement over the months. I have found your website a constant source of inspiration and hope.

JC.

I was relieved on finding your site to see I am not the only person to be fighting against an inefficient set up...

DJ.

Just visit the site, since describing what they are doing, who (and how many) they are affecting, and the sheer injustice of that to which these people have fallen victim would take too long.

RR.

The folks behind this site have given me hope and support. Without their devoted campaign and support I may well have gone mad.

DS.

Words cannot express the gratitude I feel towards the people behind this site

AH.

This website gave me hope when I found it because I realised at last that I was not alone in my dispute against the monolith that is HMRC. Out of the blue it had demanded repayment from me of £2500, but with the help of this website and the great people who run Tax Credit Casualties I discovered that the error was completely the fault of HMRC. There was no way I could have known about it. The Tax Credit system is a shambles of which Gordon Brown should be thoroughly ashamed. More than 2 million of the 6 million people entitled to Tax Credits are overpaid each year. Tax Credit Casualties offers help and support to any of these people who contact it and all on a voluntary basis!

SB.

The amazing women behind this website/campaign deserve to be knighted for what they are doing to help some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. They are dogged, determined and (correctly) driven by a sense that what they are doing is morally and ethically 'the right thing', helping some of the country's lowest earners navigate the labyrinthine, Kafka-esque nightmare that is Gordon Brown's tax credit system...I am certain that the women behind the Tax Credit Casualties campaign have saved the life of at least one taxpayer essentially criminalised and driven to utter despair by HMRC + the amount of good work that they do on a day-to-day basis faced with the sheer bloody-mindedness and arrogance of HMRC and the Treasury is unbelievable. Remember - these women had absolutely no training in financial matters when they started this campaign + have not been paid a single penny for the many hours that they have spent helping countless families in their quest for justice. They are angels!!

KB.

The help and support I received from this site and the people behind it has enabled me to move forward with my life and feel confident about my future finances. Thank you TCC. You are all BRILLIANT!!!

GF.

HMRC had never given any indication that an overpayment could be disputed, let alone any information about how to dispute. I learnt that there was an alternative to banging my head against the HMRC brick wall.

Two years later, and I am still in dispute about my overpayment. Numerous letters written to HMRC are still unanswered. Still nothing resolved.

But I am able to cope now, although I will never be able to fully move forward in my life until HMRC allow me to close the chapter on that period of my life.

Without being dramatic, Tax Credit Casualties are one of the major reasons I am here to write these words today.
Thank you.

R.

The TCC are dynamic a fantastic team, who keep you sane during this absolute nightmare tax credit system.

AW.

It was a hard slog that would have been so much easier had I known then about the Tax Credit Casualties. The knowledge that they have acquired about the failures in the Tax Credit system and the incompetence, arrogance and indifference that abounds within HMRC and our present Government is vast. It is this knowledge and the sharing of it that makes Tax Credit Casualties such a formidable force and source of help to those afflicted by the blight of Gordon Brown's Tax Credits.

KP.

Thank you to them, from the bottom of my heart, for their undaunting perseverance and unconditional support given to so many out there who feel there is no way out. They are a rare breed who deserve all the recognition they can get!

M.

Thankfully someone cares, because not many do. It seems to be a new sport - rip the people with least money and sadly a Labour government is one of the major players. The world has gone MAD, and this sane site should win awards.

MS.

Where would be without Tax Credit Casualties ??? I had no one to turn to until I discovered this fantastic group of unpaid volunteers. They do a great job and deserve recognition. A big thank you to all of them.

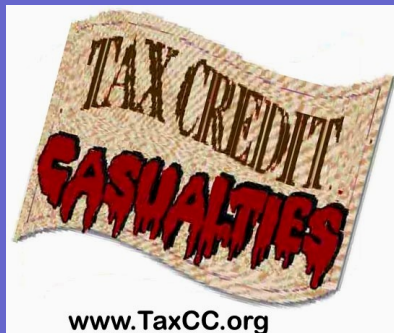
NP.

No one to turn to !!! Who you gonna call ?? Tax credit casualties. Don't bother with the rest, Go to the best - T.C.C. C.A.B, MP, Waste of time. This organisation deserves every award going. How many people help you free of charge and don't expect anything in return ??? A big kiss to all of you X

LW.

Tax Credit Casualties saved us a CCJ and thousands of pounds by giving us the advice we needed to fight a completely unfair tax credit overpayment demand. The amount they have achieved with the resources they have is just phenomenal, and down to the passion and hard graft of a small number of victims turned campaigners. If other campaigns think their Goliaths are big, they have not faced the arrogant, unaccountable, legally-unchallengeable HMRC.

www.taxcc.org



**This document has been produced by the Tax Credit Casualties with the support
and assistance of
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