Preparing for the EURO in Scotland
The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) was set up by government in 1975. Our purpose is to promote the interests of consumers in Scotland, with particular regard to those people who experience disadvantage in society. While producers of goods and services are usually well-organised and articulate when protecting their own interests, individual consumers very often are not. The people whose interests we represent are consumers of all kinds: they may be patients, tenants, parents, solicitors’ clients, public transport users, or simply shoppers in a supermarket.

Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. Balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-making about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

The SCC is part of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and is sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry. The SCC’s Chairman and Council members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in consultation with the First Minister.

The Scottish Consumer Council shapes its own policies and the views expressed in this report are independent of our sponsoring department and of government.

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The Scottish Consumer Council
March 2005

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Written by Trisha McAuley
“Two years after the introduction of the euro, half of the consumers in the eurozone reported that the euro still caused them difficulty.”1

1 European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer, “The Euro, two years later,” December 2003
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INTRODUCTION

In January 2002, the twelve member states of the European Union that had joined the eurozone began to use euro cash. The UK Government has set out five economic tests that must be met before any decision to join the euro can be made:

- Whether there has been sustainable convergence between the UK’s business cycle and economic structures and those of the eurozone.
- Whether there is sufficient flexibility to cope with any problems that may arise.
- The effect on firms making long-term decisions to invest in Britain.
- The impact on the competitive position of the UK’s financial services industry.
- Whether it will promote growth, stability and a lasting increase in jobs.

The prospect of the UK being part of the eurozone may seem a long way off. However, legislation is currently being put in place to enable a referendum to be held as soon as possible if the government and parliament decide that the economic conditions are right for entry into the euro. Treasury preparations are well underway to ensure that the UK is in an appropriate state of readiness for the far-reaching implications of currency change. It is planned that full transition to the euro would be completed within thirty months of a referendum.

A consumer focus would be vital in ensuring that any process of transition to the eurozone was well planned, and gave clear protection and information to consumers. This would mean ensuring that the consumer interest was identified and acted upon. Consumers would need to be empowered to take an active part in the planning and delivery of change. They would need to be protected from unfair commercial practices and have effective recourse to redress when things go wrong.

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) has no policy on whether the UK should enter the eurozone or not. Assessing the risks, costs and benefits has to have its focus on all citizens in the UK and is not within our competence. However, if the UK does agree to join the euro, then how the changeover is introduced, and the transition managed, will have important implications for consumers in Scotland.
This briefing builds on the lessons learnt from the European consumer experience of what worked and didn’t work in 2002—the first phase of eurozone entry. The purpose of the briefing is to:

- Inform decision makers and providers of goods and services in all sectors about consumer concerns in the key aspects of any transition to the euro.
- Highlight issues of consumer interest which effective transition would need to address.
- Encourage and develop dialogue and partnership among the broad range of key stakeholders in Scotland with the aim of ensuring that any changeover to the euro benefits all.

The SCC’s focus is on reducing the risk that currency change would impact adversely on disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers, leading to increased social exclusion and bringing with it problems rather than benefits. Scotland would also face particular issues in relation to consumers living in rural, remote and island areas.

This briefing builds on the findings of eurozone consumer research. Policy makers, businesses and public services should ensure that their euro preparations are informed by research with consumers and service users.

The Treasury is working with a group of pathfinder local authorities on euro preparations. In Scotland, the three local authorities that are acting as pathfinders are:
- Glasgow City
- Edinburgh City
- South Lanarkshire.

This briefing identifies seven key issues from the Treasury’s Third Outline National Changeover Plan, published in June 2003, that would pose particular challenges during any changeover to the euro:
- Capital investment costs
- Dual circulation of currency
- Dual price display
- Consumer codes of practice
- Fair pricing
- Banking practice
- Resolving disputes
- Information and advice.

We set out what we believe would need to be done to ensure both that public services remained accessible to service users, and that businesses benefited from continuous consumer confidence.
The UK’s entry to the eurozone is by no means certain. Yet organizations may have to invest in preparations and bear the costs of that investment well in advance of any decision to enter or not. The Treasury is advising businesses and other organizations to consider euro preparations as part of their normal business planning and risk management. Treasury proposals do not give any idea of the level of resource commitment that the government or the European Commission would be prepared to make in the light of a decision to enter the eurozone. However, it is emphasised that it would be the responsibility of individual organisations to bear their own costs.

While changeover costs would be unavoidable for the providers of goods and services, it would be important to ensure that consumers alone were not asked to bear the full brunt of these costs. Euro entry would bring benefits as well as burdens to business. Therefore, the cost burden should be shared by all stakeholders, and should encompass those who have stakes in private business (owners and investors) and those who have stakes in public sector providers (government and citizens as taxpayers).

The effect of any investment made by businesses now and at any changeover will be long-lasting. It will be equally important to ensure that paying for essential front-loaded capital costs should be shared by all those who will benefit in the future. This needs to be built into forward capital and operational expenditure plans.

In the five-year run-up to the introduction of the first wave of the euro, national governments and the European Commission spent a total of 400 million euros, working out at 1.05 euro per inhabitant.


“It was disturbing to us to consider that according to recent figures from HM Treasury, there are still about 600,000 SMEs across the UK which have not yet addressed the issue of the euro, with a fair proportion of these being in Scotland.”

Scottish Parliament European Committee 8th Report, 2001

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) report Ready for Change? aims to:

- Help voluntary and community organisations think about how they would be affected if the UK adopted the Euro; and
- Highlight the role that government and voluntary organisations could play to help the sector in the event of the UK entering the single currency.

NCVO, Ready for Change?, February 2004
Support for small businesses would be crucial. Research in Europe has shown that many of the problems experienced by consumers in relation to pricing occurred in this sector, where shopkeepers and small businesses were less aware of consumer codes of practice and less well-resourced to implement them. This would be of particular importance in areas where access to larger retailers was limited, for example, in rural and remote areas and in urban deprived areas.

The importance of the voluntary sector in euro preparations cannot be overestimated from the perspective of consumers, and particularly those who are disadvantaged. This is because: it is a key provider of advice, information and support to communities and to vulnerable groups; it is a large-scale provider of services to consumers; and it has a commercial relationship with consumers, for example, via charity shops. Government would have to take a pro-active approach to resourcing and supporting the voluntary sector.

**DUAL CIRCULATION OF CURRENCY**

The government is proposing a two-month dual circulation period when sterling (the “legacy” currency) and the euro would be in circulation together. While retailers would have to accept either currency in cash, they would likely give change in euros only. All non-cash transactions would be denominated in euros. At the end of the two-month period, sterling would cease to be legal tender. However, consumers would still be able to exchange sterling notes and coins at banks for a pre-determined, but not yet agreed, period of time.

Dual circulation would be a key factor in promoting consumer confidence in the euro. There would be risks to consumers in too long a period of dual currency. Thinking in two currencies could increase the risk of confusion. Over-reliance on the legacy currency could affect mastery of the new currency and lead to disadvantage in the new marketplace.
However, too short a period of dual circulation could result in a premature withdrawal of legal tender of sterling and leave consumers to use currency with which they were not sufficiently familiar. Ceasing legal tender of sterling too soon could impact adversely on vulnerable consumers, many of whom use a cash-based approach to budgeting.

Current proposals for a two-month dual circulation period would leave little slack for consumers who have been out of Scotland during the changeover, for example, on business trips or on holidays. In addition, premature withdrawal of legal tender would be likely to impact most on those who are disadvantaged and who have less direct access to a bank. This could include:

- people living in remote and island areas
- people with impaired mobility
- homeless people
- people who rely on others, for example, carers or home helps, to access their cash
- people who not possess a bank account
- people who have been hospitalised during the changeover
- elderly people.

While we acknowledge that most people would probably dispose of their sterling quickly, we believe that, in order to promote consumer confidence, sterling would need to remain legal tender for not less than six months. This would give added protection to vulnerable consumers. If the period of dual circulation was to remain as short as two months, then provision should be made for at least twelve months for people to be able to change everyday amounts of national currency into euros free of charge at all financial institutions.

Research carried out by Consumers in Europe Group found that 74% of UK consumers favoured a dual running period of at least six months.

Consumers in Europe Group, “Introducing the Euro,” February 2000
DUAL DISPLAY

Dual display is the provision of price information in both the legacy and the new currency. Under the government’s current proposals, retailers would be free to decide whether or not to show prices in both the euro and sterling. A voluntary approach to using dual display would be encouraged under consumer codes of practice.

We strongly believe that there should be a mandatory requirement for retailers to display price information in both sterling and euro. The 1999 survey by Consumers in Europe Group found that 74% of people living in Britain believed that all shops should be required by law to show price information in both sterling and euro compared with 10% who believed that shops should be free to decide for themselves.

European research found that implementation of these voluntary schemes did not result in widespread dual display of prices. It found that while most supermarkets and big retailers practised dual display, small retailers rarely did so. This would have particular implications for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, who use smaller shops more often than others. It could have a significant adverse impact on those disadvantaged consumers who face barriers in accessing large retailers or a choice of suppliers. Research shows that the public is also in favour of a mandatory approach.

As soon as a decision is made to enter the eurozone, providers should be encouraged to use dual display. This would give consumers as long a time as possible to familiarise themselves with the euro and what it means for them in terms of prices. However, a mandatory requirement to use dual display should begin six months prior to the introduction of euro notes and coins.

Euro denominated retail financial services would start to become available ten months before the introduction of cash. Dual display for these often very complex products should be mandatory from the start of the ten-month period.

In order to avoid confusion, the consumer code should also require retailers to use a consistent format for dual display and ensure that both currencies are given equal prominence.

“Of course, results vary from country to country. While in Belgium and Finland this figure is close to 60% and reaches 81% in Luxembourg, in most countries (Austria, France, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and Germany) only about 30-40% of retailers are already practising some form of dual pricing, not necessarily for all products, nor in a comprehensive way.”

*European Commission, January 02 Eurobarometer*
Dual display should be obligatory throughout the dual circulation period. At least six months would be necessary if consumers were to be given adequate time to adjust to and become familiarised with the changes. January 2002 Eurobarometer research revealed that 66.9% of people living in the eurozone thought that only after six months or longer could the value in national currency totally disappear without affecting them.

We acknowledge, however, that too long a period of dual display could become counter-productive in that consumers could become over-reliant on the mechanism and continue to think in their national currency. References in sterling therefore should not be left to retailers’ discretion after the end of the dual circulation period. This could bring with it the danger of retailers retaining dual display as a competitive instrument long after it has any positive benefits for consumers. There should be an agreed end to dual display built into the changeover timetable.

A major European Commission survey of consumers’ experiences of and views on the Euro two years after its introduction found that:

- 26% of consumers in the eurozone still had difficulty handling and recognising Euro coins.
- 54% of consumers still used their former national currency as a benchmark value when making large purchases.
- 46% of consumers still used their former national currency as a benchmark value during day-to-day shopping.
- 46% of consumers wished to see the continuation of dual price display; percentages were higher for older people, people with a lower level of education and unemployed and manual workers.

*European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer, “The Euro, two years later,” December 2003*

Retailers should provide information in at least one of two ways – individual product pricing or shelf-edge price labels. While other organisations have recommended conversion charts as a viable source of price information, this would wrongly put the onus on the customer to calculate prices. The onus should be on retailers to provide price information; using conversion charts would relieve them of this responsibility and pass on any risk to consumers. This would cause particular problems for those in vulnerable groups.
CONSUMER CODES OF PRACTICE

With the aim of maintaining consumer confidence, the government would introduce consumer codes of practice. Codes would cover issues such as price information, accurate conversion, staff training and the treatment of vulnerable consumer groups. However, the government is proposing a voluntary approach to adherence to the codes in order to reduce the regulatory burden on business and because experience in the euro area was that voluntary approaches generally worked as well as mandatory ones.

We are disappointed that the government has decided, so far, that a voluntary approach is preferable in relation to the proposed consumer codes. We cannot see how making the code mandatory would increase the burden on business and reduce red tape. As with any system of self-regulation, respectable traders would sign up to the code. Increased regulation would therefore only affect those traders who were less respectable, and against whom consumers would need the most protection. There would also be less incentive to sign up to the code where there were fewer competitive pressures. This could have an adverse effect in any sector where there was a monopoly supplier.

Consumer codes would be ineffective if consumers themselves were unaware of their existence. Informing and educating consumers about what they should expect from a code user would be very important. This should be part of any communications campaign. A requirement to display codes so that customers can read them should be included as part of code criteria.

Codes should include:

- The need to use a consistent format in dual displays.
- Information telling customers that prices have been converted using the official exchange rate.
- A requirement to use dual display on all till receipts where the technology allows this to be done.
- The provision of a freephone contact number for consumers.

Helping those in Debt

It will be crucial that people who are in debt are not penalised in a transitional period and that conversions of debt payments by creditors from sterling into the euro do not put borrowers further into debt. This group of often vulnerable consumers would require clear information about how their debt would be re-calculated and at what point they would be required to repay in the euro rather than sterling.

Mail Order

Consumers in the Highland and Islands are heavy users of mail order facilities. Mail order companies should be required to follow a code of practice setting out the principles on which they would trade fairly with consumers during the transition, how any repayment instalments should be phased and calculated, and what information they should be giving their customers.

“The UK has the great advantage of being able to learn from the experience of the first wave euro countries. The clear message from consumer organisations in these countries is that, even if most retailers behave responsibly, there is sufficient evidence of abuse by a minority to suggest that a voluntary approach to price information is insufficient.”

Consumers Association, “Consumers & the Euro,” 2003
FAIR PRICING

Eurozone price monitoring analyses have varied according to sources, sectors and member states and there has been no clear consensus on whether the introduction of the euro did, in fact, result in higher prices all round. If consumers were to have confidence in the euro, they would need to be able to see clearly how the euro price relates to what they were paying in pounds before. Where price levels were different, consumers would want to know the reasons why and to be reassured that these reasons were legitimate. European regulations for the first wave changeover stated that “monetary amounts after conversion into a euro unit shall be rounded up or down to the nearest cent”. In some countries, businesses entered into voluntary agreements to freeze prices for a specified period.

We are not convinced that regulatory intervention in the market to artificially fix prices for an agreed period would enhance consumer protection. Where competition was working well, price stability agreements could have the effect of stifling retailers’ flexibility to react to competitive pressures and introduce better deals for their customers. While price stability agreements could guard against higher prices being introduced under cover of euro entry, they could equally lessen the chances of some prices being lowered. There is every possibility that consumers could face additional disadvantage if the prices of very many items rose simultaneously either just before or at the end of an agreement period. There is also the possibility that annual price rises would be introduced prematurely in order to avoid any price freeze.

The key issue in relation to prices would be one of transparency and of retailers being able to justify the rationale for any price rises. There would also need to be a robust, consistent approach to price monitoring, with agreement on methodology by as many stakeholders as possible. Specifically Scottish data would be essential and should be able to be disaggregated from any relevant UK monitoring information. There should be a real threat of sanctions being applied to companies that have been found to trade unfairly. Effective and well-resourced enforcement arrangements would be essential.

Where effective competition exists, competitive pressures may cushion the costs to consumers. However, this may not help where there is little or no access to a range of providers, for example, in remote and island areas, or in urban deprived areas. Furthermore, this issue stretches across sectors and includes public sector monopoly services in Scotland such as water and social care.

European research has shown that prices rose significantly in relation to the provision of personal services, where consumers tended not to shop around and relied on one supplier for items such as hairdressing or laundry. This was also the case in many small, local shops.
While there would be nothing to prevent providers changing their prices, more emphasis would need to be given to the need to avoid introducing new pricing strategies at changeover time.

There would need to be agreement and clarity about whether rounding up should be based on the price of individual items or on transactions. This could have significant cost implications for consumers. Research by the Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs (BEUC), published in a press release in 2001, showed that, because there was no clear definition of what was meant by a “monetary amount”, rounding up practices were inconsistent from one company to another. BEUC also found evidence that rounding up of prices was not always consistent with the official exchange rate.

In the interests of transparency, there should be a requirement to display easy-to-read information for consumers about how the rounding and smoothing principles have been applied.

In relation to pricing, the European Commission survey of consumers’ experiences of and views on the euro two years after its introduction found that:

- 89% of consumers felt that prices had been converted to their detriment.
- Only 31% of consumers had not changed their spending patterns as a result of the introduction of the euro: 29% claimed to have spent more because they did not realise how much they were spending and 38% claimed to have spent less for fear of spending too much. Manual workers, those without a job, and those with a lower level of education bought less than all the others for fear of over-stretching themselves.
- 48% of people expressed doubt as to the euro’s ability to stabilise prices.
- Half of those surveyed did not believe that the single currency had contributed to reducing price differences between countries in the eurozone.

*European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer, The Euro, Two Years Later, December 2003*
BANKING PRACTICE

The Treasury’s current National Changeover Plan is silent on the issue of bank charges. However, there is evidence of good practice in Europe where banking currency exchange services were provided free for both customers and non-customers. There are no published proposals at present for the banking industry to have a consumer code with regard to the euro, similar to those that the government is encouraging in a range of other sectors. The Association of Payment Clearing Services (APACS), in its UK Banking Industry Outline Euro Blueprint, states that the existing Banking Code, which offers general standards, would provide adequate consumer protection.

It goes without saying that banks would play a central role in the currency changeover and as providers of essential financial services. Eurobarometer research has consistently shown that people will go to banks as their first source of advice about the euro.

We believe that it would be unacceptable for the banking industry not to have a consumer code in relation to the euro and that this too should be mandatory. The Banking Code Standards Board should consider issuing such a code to the industry.

Consumers would have no choice but to exchange currencies at changeover time and it would be essential to have a mandatory requirement on banks to:

- Not charge their customers for exchanging currency.
- Exchange currency free of charge to non-customers, at least up to an agreed ceiling. This would be particularly important for the large numbers of low income consumers who do not have a bank account.

This is an issue that could have significant adverse impact on many disadvantaged consumers.

“A Code of Practice already exists for the banking industry – the Banking Code. This Code sets standards of good service that customers can expect from their bank and already includes provisions matching the government’s draft Code of Practice. It is therefore not envisaged that a separate Code of Practice specifically covering euro changeover issues would be published.”

APACS, The UK Banking Industry Outline Euro Blueprint, June 2002

A recent survey of public opinion in the new member states found that bank accounts and salary information are the most important issue about the euro that people believe information campaigns should focus on.

EOS Gallup Europe for the European Commission, Introduction of the Euro in the New Member States, September 2004

In Belgium:

- The financial sector agreed to perform Belgian franc-euro conversions of accounts automatically and free of charge from January 1999 (three years before changeover), making it “possible for consumers to familiarise themselves with the new currency at their own pace”.
- The banks ran a month-long “operation piggy bank” in November 2001 in order to collect individuals’ holdings of Belgian franc coins free of charge.
- Bank customers were able to exchange Belgian francs for euros free of charge and without limit during the period of dual circulation. Individuals who were not customers were allowed to exchange, free of charge, a limited amount, fixed by the bank in advance.
RESOLVING DISPUTES

In the first wave changeover, the European Commission recommended that countries set up “Euro Observatories” during currency changeover, although not all countries chose to follow this recommendation. If the UK followed this recommendation, a Euro Observatory could act as a mediator to resolve disputes over the euro without the need for litigation. It is envisaged that members of a Euro Observatory could include representatives from local government, business and consumer organisations. This is the only reference in the current National Changeover Plan to the need for consumers to have access to quick and fair complaints mechanisms in relation to the euro.

The Treasury’s National Changeover Plan needs to include proposals for ensuring that providers of goods and services put into place complaints procedures that are accessible, speedy and fair. The proposed consumer codes should contain this requirement.

Where consumers become involved in disputes, they need to have access to an appropriate and affordable means of resolving them. But consumers should not have to bear the costs of transition to the euro by having to go to court to do this. In the context of euro transition, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms would have to be promoted to facilitate early resolution and to ensure that people had to go to court as a last resort only.

During any transition to the euro, the government should promote mediation, where a neutral third party helps the parties in dispute to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both sides. This would help businesses and consumers by:

- Offering flexibility and focusing on what the parties want to achieve.
- Offering parties informality and privacy.
- Providing a cheaper and quicker option than going to court.

In Belgium, local Euro Observatories were used to deliver the government’s communication strategy. They were also tasked with identifying and resolving consumer issues, and distributing euro information. They were given a particular remit to help vulnerable consumers and people on low incomes. This included working with representatives of vulnerable groups and recruiting people to help train vulnerable individuals how to use the euro.
We believe that, if introduced in the UK, Euro Observatories should have a mediation function. Mediation would ensure that disadvantaged consumers had an accessible and affordable way of resolving any dispute.

The independence of Euro Observatories would be vital. We believe that the government should give clear and detailed guidance on how this would be achieved.

It would be important for Euro Observatories to adopt a pro-active approach to helping consumers. They would have to act to ensure that all consumers in their local area were aware of their existence and that they were truly accessible to everyone and responsive to local issues.

**INFORMATION AND ADVICE**

All of the issues we have highlighted in this briefing would pose challenges for providers of goods and services and for consumer confidence in the changeover to the euro and beyond. However, no proposals to ensure a smooth changeover would work if not underpinned by effective provision of information and advice for consumers at every stage of transition.

"Where countries have managed the transition to the euro effectively, consumer organisations report fewer concerns in terms of consumer confidence and unfair commercial practices. Poor management of the transition, however, is associated with less confident consumers and more widespread unfair commercial practice."


**Supporting Vulnerable Groups**

It would be essential to have in place accessible sources of advice for people in vulnerable groups. These sources should, where possible, be based on existing networks of advice and support that people are using at local level, and with which they feel familiar. However, it would be unfair to expect voluntary organisations and community groups to bear the brunt of providing this service. It would be essential for government to commit adequate resources to ensuring that vulnerable consumers could access advice effectively and that advice providers received the necessary financial support. This would not be achieved by using an ad hoc approach and a strategy for ensuring an effective network of local advice provision for vulnerable consumers would need to be developed in Scotland. Euro Observatories at local level would be ideally positioned to undertake this role, working with local authorities and Consumer Support Networks.
The UK’s third outline National Changeover Plan explains how the government would develop a high-level communications strategy aimed at businesses and citizens, and pays particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups. We believe that policy makers, public services and businesses in Scotland would need to ensure that they addressed the following issues in any information campaign or communications strategy.

Working in Partnership to include:

- **The advice sector.** Using existing networks of advice and information support for consumers. This would include citizens advice bureaux, local authority consumer advice centres, Consumer Direct Scotland and Consumer Support Networks. Organisations that should be involved include Money Advice Scotland and Citizens Advice Scotland. The national disability information service, Update, should also be involved.

- **Specialist organisations that work on behalf of specific groups of consumers,** including those who offer support to people with disabilities, the elderly, people on low incomes, and children. This should include both national organisations and those working at community level.

- **Specialist consumer organisations in Scotland.** These bodies give direct advice to consumers of energy (energywatch Scotland), postal services (Postwatch Scotland) and water (Water Customer Consultation Panels). They would almost certainly be the focus of sectoral consumer complaints in relation to the Euro.

**Staff Training,** particularly for frontline staff, would be essential – in France, a half-day training session was delivered to every public sector worker in the country. The private sector is no different and we would look to trade associations to facilitate training for small businesses and larger companies to ensure that they invest in this important customer service issue. In Europe, supermarkets and department stores appointed one or more members of staff specifically to answer customers’ queries about the euro. Local authorities and chambers of commerce distributed posters showing the euro banknotes and the full set of coins to traders.
Information and Education Campaigns would need to:

- Have a clear focus on communicating effectively with vulnerable groups.
- Address the needs of people living in remote and island areas.
- Ensure that information is easily accessible i.e. available in a wide range of places such as banks, libraries, post offices, Citizens Advice Bureaux, supermarkets, stations etc.
- Use new technology and electronic communication imaginatively.
- Be informed by research on consumer need.

Practical Materials to aid familiarity with the euro would need to be readily available. Research has shown that conversion tools appear to have been of help to many people in the eurozone. Vulnerable consumer groups could find them particularly valuable. Simple, easy-to-use conversion devices should be made available to every household on request and an additional strategy for automatic distribution to targeted groups of disadvantaged consumers would need to be developed. However, provision of conversion tools should not be seen as a means of removing the onus on retailers to provide proper price information.

Starter Kits
Just before the introduction of the euro in January 2002, starter kits of euro coins went on sale in all countries to help familiarise consumers with the new currency. A similar strategy should be developed in Scotland.

Accessible Information and Advice for Disabled People
People with a disability should not be put at a disadvantage through a lack of information which they can effectively access and which meets individual need. The Scottish Consumer Council manages the Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF). The Forum’s members comprise disabled people, carers and information providers and its purpose is to promote the provision of accessible information and advice for disabled people. SAIF has published National Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision and a Directory of Alternative Formats Providers. Both publications are available free of charge from the SCC or by downloading from SAIF’s website www.saifscotland.org.uk
In Spain, a leaflet about the euro was inserted into a general mailshot to everyone in receipt of a state pension. There is scope for using government departments in a similar way in this country. Local authorities could insert a leaflet in council tax notices. Utility companies could include euro price information in bills.

**Examples of Good Practice in Belgium**

- The General Commission for the Euro, set up by the government, developed a website for the public and established a national free-phone call centre, both of which are still in operation.

- The *Euro Made Easy* programme provided specific educational tools and training for people in contact with disadvantaged sections of the community.

- The government distributed free conversion kits to elderly people.

- National daily television broadcasts focused on value scales and each day showed a different product with its price in euros.

- Three months before the cash changeover, the government sent a letter to every household in the country containing the main dates for the transition, and a conversion table of the main values in the euro. Also enclosed was an information sheet from the National Bank of Belgium designed to prevent cases of fraud during the transition.

- Two months before changeover a leaflet designating the authentication features of euro banknotes and coins was sent to every household – 6.5 million copies in three languages.

- As part of a national competition, schools received a series of posters with information about euro coins and banknotes.

- A training programme for cashiers was developed based on the *train the trainer* principle. Eight hundred people attended training seminars at which they received a training kit comprising a training brochure, a video cassette, a CD-rom and a powerpoint presentation. Training was then cascaded to 150,000 people.

- Postcards and tablemats were distributed widely to cafés and restaurants.

- Organisations were offered free euro starter kits of coins to give to their employees, provided the employees accepted responsibility to distribute more starter kits. More than one million kits were distributed in this way.
**Eurozone Members**
Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain.

**EU Member States which remain outside the Eurozone**
Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

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**More Information**
If you would like more information on the issues raised in this briefing, please contact Trisha McAuley at the SCC office or email tmcauley@scotconsumer.org.uk

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**The Scottish Consumer Council**
The purpose of the Scottish Consumer Council is to make all consumers matter. For more information on what we are doing visit our website at [www.scotconsumer.org.uk](http://www.scotconsumer.org.uk)
The website gives free access to all our reports, publications and policy work in progress. SCC publications in printed formats are available from our office at the address below. Publications are available in alternative formats on request. Please contact us for details.

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Published by the Scottish Consumer Council, March 2005