

Measuring the satisfaction of partners and stakeholders on behalf of the Pension, Disability and Carers Service

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Following the creation of the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) from The Pension Service and the Disability and Carers Service, a decision was made to undertake a more comprehensive survey of how successfully the business works with partners and stakeholders. The PDCS Partner and Satisfaction Tracker was developed by ComRes to build on the previous research on the effectiveness of PDCS consultation and partnerships with both local and national partners and stakeholders. This project has developed an ongoing tracking mechanism to capture stakeholder and partner opinion. It addresses key areas including awareness, favourability, consultation, partnerships, areas for improvement and value of communications.

To meet these aims, ComRes conducted a quantitative survey of stakeholders (members of the PDCS Advisory Forum) and partners on PDCS's list of partner organisations. Following this research, ComRes interviewed 20 stakeholders and partners in depth by telephone. These interviews were part of the Satisfaction Tracker and will be the baseline for future consultation. Recommendations for this further consultation and action have been provided, and this work will also feed into further waves of the Satisfaction Tracker.

Overall, the outputs from this first PDCS Partner and Stakeholder Satisfaction Tracker are an encouragement to PDCS to continue its positive relationship development work and maintain the currently favourable relationship that it has with its stakeholders, and the large majority of partners. Almost 85 per cent of respondents agree that PDCS works well with their organisation to provide good services to their customers. This research does

also identify several areas for improvement and opportunities for increased support.

Stakeholders and partners were happy to offer their views both in the quantitative and qualitative elements of the audit and their comments and recommendations provide clear and helpful themes to consider when moving forward. We believe that there are four key themes to draw out from the detailed report:

- 1 Respondents would like to be kept better informed**
– Stakeholders and partners would like to receive more information from PDCS, particularly about proposed changes; whether this relates to new policy initiatives or simple advice on individual client cases.
- 2 There is value in targeting different levels of seniority across organisations** – There was quite a difference in feedback from people of different seniority in organisations, those higher up and more distanced being often more critical, potentially because they are less well informed.
- 3 Local visibility and personal contact work best**
– For the most part, participants ask for a more localised approach to partner relationships. There is an understanding of the need to centralise certain functions, but partners are keen to maintain personal contact with PDCS personnel wherever possible.
- 4 Partners would like more active engagement**
– There was a strong theme from partners, in particular that they would like to have greater engagement with them by PDCS.

Stakeholders and partners are all fairly familiar with PDCS, although there is little awareness of the rebranding of PDCS. At least four out of five stakeholders and partners report a degree of familiarity with The Pension Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Disabilities and Carers Service. Similarly, awareness of PDCS's services is high – although the products and services provided by The Pension Service are more widely acknowledged.

Partners and stakeholders are positive towards PDCS. However, there is a discernable difference in perceptions of PDCS between stakeholders and partners who have had face to face contact with PDCS and those who have not – those who have had face-to-face contact are more likely to give positive responses about PDCS. **The importance of face-to-face contact is reiterated throughout the qualitative interviews.**

Encouragingly, 22 per cent of stakeholders and partners say they would speak highly of PDCS without being asked. Indeed, there is a strong impression that partners value their relationship with PDCS and hold them in high regard. **A positive recommendation is likely to be directly related to stakeholders' and partners' experiences of working with PDCS in the past.**

Most stakeholders and partners report a fairly active level of contact with PDCS through PDCS staff, the DWP website, Directgov, information from colleagues and internet search engines. This suggests that stakeholders and participants are actively looking for ways to get information about DWP and PDCS. PDCS partners are very communications friendly and this is the base of much of the positive sentiment towards PDCS. With the shift to the Directgov website, this is seen as useful but email and website contact is second to personal contact. Fifteen per cent of stakeholders and partners say that they would like *'more communication or direct contact'*. Moreover, **there is a thirst for information which has yet to be fully satisfied.**

During the qualitative interviews, a number of

participants expressed a degree of frustration at having their requests for information thwarted and the need for more communications. Twenty-two per cent of partners and 14 per cent of stakeholders say that lack of communication or information provision is the worst thing about their relationship with PDCS. Indeed, 32 per cent of partners comment that increased joint working and sharing of information would be beneficial to their organisation. Moreover, there is a degree of exasperation among some participants that they do not have a direct channel of communication with a relevant expert in their field, resulting in considerable time spent 'holding the line' whilst being transferred from one person to another.

Looking ahead, **60 per cent of partners and 43 per cent of stakeholders would like to have more regular consultations** with PDCS. Consultation is not a key part of the work of PDCS with partners, but it is important to note this desire for more consultation by some stakeholders. The report offers recommendations on next steps for future consultations and how to move forward on regular audits.

Specific recommendations and improvements

Stakeholders and partners were happy to offer advice on the best way to deliver a more effective service to their partners, the most salient of which are summarised below.

Partners

For partners, maintaining a strong local relationship is key behind their recommendations which are summarised below:

- For the most part, participants ask for a more localised approach to partner relationships. Although many partners understand the need to centralise certain functions, particularly in the current economic climate, they are anxious to maintain **personal contact with PDCS personnel** wherever possible.

- If loss of local contact is unavoidable, it is important for partners and stakeholders alike that they have a designated contact at PDCS or DWP who is familiar with the participant's organisation and role.
- Thought should be given to targeting different levels in national partner organisations with different types of briefing material to ensure that familiarity is also built up at key higher levels.
- The feedback indicates changing communication preferences. For example, the internet is a favoured way of communication which fits in with the introduction of the Directgov website and there is a thirst for communications. Face- to-face communication is seen positively and the increased use of the internet is an opportunity.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders need to be addressed in a slightly different way. There is an overlap with partners in the broad areas for recommendations and improvements, but these unique relationships also identify some more detailed recommendations to be addressed.

- Stakeholders value their role in the consultation process, but a significant proportion are interested in building on this. More regular consultations and more time allocated is something that stakeholders have expressed could help improve their consultations with PDCS.
- Stakeholders and partners would like to receive more information from PDCS, whether this relates to new policy initiatives or simple advice on individual client cases.
- Stakeholders are also particularly keen to play a greater role in contributing to proposed changes to policy or processes when they are at the planning stage and this may be a valuable way to involve these key decision makers.

This research initiative by PDCS was welcomed by participants and the research outputs are clear. The **PDCS Partner and Satisfaction Tracker** is now positioned with partners and stakeholders to be a useful regular feedback mechanism to regularly seek to improve on the lines of communication between

The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 839 3. Research Report 692. September 2010).

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