

Development of a customer experience metric for contracted employment provision

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BMRB were commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to research factors affecting customer satisfaction with contracted employment provision. The purpose was to inform the development of a 'customer metric' to measure customer experiences of provision and provide a basis for customer choice between providers.

A key element of the DWP 2008 Commissioning Strategy is the move to *'a single, integrated, shared and transparent approach to the measurement and management of provider performance that enables 'like-to-like' analysis of performance'*¹. To support this, a performance management system was developed for contracted employment provision, according to which a 'Star Rating' system² provides a single approach to measuring performance. The aim is for this to be accompanied by a customer experience score to enable comparison of performance in terms of customer satisfaction. The strategy pledges to *'explore what customers' expectations are in relation to contracted employment provision'* and use a measure of customer experience to assess provider performance³. This research fulfils that pledge, and will make recommendations for ongoing measurement of customer experience.

Key findings

The key findings of this research are that customer experience of contracted employment provision can be measured against the following key factors:

- **Adviser relationship;**
- **Adviser knowledge;**
- **Job opportunities;**
- **Skills development.**

Methodology

The research outlined in this report consisted of three stages:

- A **scoping exercise** to gather evidence via desk research and stakeholder interviews on the use of a customer metric for contracted employment provision and in other similar fields.
- **Exploratory qualitative research** using face-to-face depth interviews with customers to identify what they see as the key aspects of contracted employment provision.
- A **testing phase** with further qualitative research with customers, provider staff and key stakeholders, via a series of workshops and focus groups, to refine and 'test out' the findings from the exploratory research.

Scoping exercise

The scoping exercise was conducted to better understand the issues around the development of a customer metric and to prepare the research tools for the qualitative research. A literature review was undertaken which identified the

¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2008), [25]. DWP Commissioning Strategy.

² For further information see: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/star-rating-system/>

³ Department for Work and Pensions (2008), [29]. DWP Commissioning Strategy.

four key stages in the development of customer metrics:

- 1 Identify key drivers;
- 2 Convert key drivers into metrics;
- 3 Convert metrics into survey questions for use in monitoring;
- 4 Review survey findings as part of performance measurement.

In parallel with this, site visits to providers were conducted which helped to define the customer journey from a provider point of view and also identify what they believed to be the key factors underpinning customer experience.

Qualitative research with customers and key stakeholders

Qualitative research was conducted with customers in summer 2009. The factors identified by customers were broad and had multiple meanings; therefore, each factor was broken down into constituent elements in order to capture more specific aspects. Although there was general agreement of the importance of these elements, variations emerged between different customer groups which are discussed in more detail in the report. The set of key descriptors and their constitutive elements were as follows:

- **Adviser relationship:** catering to individual needs; continuity of adviser; mutual collaboration and support; and clear communication.
- **Adviser knowledge:** employment knowledge; careers advice; and wider knowledge.
- **Job opportunities:** quality and suitability; sustainability; range; and up-to-date.
- **Skills development:** training to increase vocational skills; to increase confidence and social skills; formal training leading to a qualification; training in basic skills such as language courses; work placements.

- **Financial support:** expenses – including travel costs, free stamps, clothes for interviews and other relevant costs.
- **Location of provider and job opportunities:** accessibility of provider; location of employment opportunities.
- **Facilities for job searching:** sufficient facilities for conducting job searches, including computers, telephones, easily accessible job searching such as job folders.
- **Premises:** welcoming, relaxed environment; clean, hygienic offices; other.

However, reporting back data to customers on eight items was felt to be impractical and potentially confusing, and would not facilitate a simple, easy to use comparison between providers which was one of the key objectives of the research. Thus, it was decided to refine the descriptors to four in order to develop a shorter, more functional metrics, while maintaining coverage of a range of customer needs. Despite differences between different customer groups, it was possible to identify a sub-set which would achieve this, namely:

- **Adviser relationship;**
- **Adviser knowledge;**
- **Job opportunities;**
- **Skills development.**

These four descriptors could be used as a base for developing a practical customer metrics to measure customer satisfaction with contracted employment provision. The descriptors align, to some extent, with the department's Customer Insight Key Drivers – ease of access, treatment, timely response, and outcome but reflect the specific needs of customers of contracted employment provision.

Practical considerations

Customers were also asked about the suitability of various methods for collecting and reporting customer experience data. Responses are outlined below.

- **Postal** – flexibility of being able to fill in own time however, difficulty of ensuring high response rates.
- **Face-to-face** – least effort for the respondent, however, potentially costly and time consuming and may not be feasible.
- **Telephone** – ease of response.
- **Online** – generally viewed positively, although potential problems were identified regarding a lack of IT resource and a lack of IT skills.

Customers expressed a view that there was a need to **incentivise** participation in the survey; however, it is important to note that customers were taking part in an incentivised research interview and had therefore been exposed to this option.

It was felt that each provider should have a **leaflet** with information about their services and programme. This should be attractive, colourful and interesting as well as clear and easy to understand. Verbatim comments from previous customers outlining their experiences and views should be included. Including the providers **Star Rating** on this leaflet was viewed favourably as it would be useful when making a decision.

Next steps

The next stage of the research will take the four key descriptors from the qualitative research and adapt them for use in a quantitative survey. This will involve a period of questionnaire development including cognitive testing. Once the questionnaire has been developed there will then be a pilot survey to test fieldwork procedures and likely response rates. Finally, a set of recommendations will be made which set out the optimal design for the ongoing measurement of the customer experience of contracted employment provision.

The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 773 0. Research Report 655. June 2010).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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