

Pension, Disability and Carers Service annual report of quarterly satisfaction monitor 2009/10

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Background and objectives

The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) was formed in April 2008 from the amalgamation of The Pension Service (TPS) and the Disability and Carers Service (DCS). It is responsible for delivering a range of age and disability-related benefits. Following the formation of PDCS, a customer survey was launched to monitor satisfaction with the service and to ensure that the customer voice could be heard when it comes to operational and policy planning.

The survey was designed to only include contacting customers. Customers who received benefit payments, but had no interactions with the service beyond this, are excluded. Interviews were conducted by telephone with customers who had contact with PDCS in the previous six months and fieldwork was completed in four sweeps between July 2009 and August 2010, comprising a total of 5,941 interviews.

Overall performance

One of the key performance measures in the survey was overall customer satisfaction with the service and 92 per cent were satisfied with PDCS as a whole in 2009/10. Overall satisfaction was slightly higher for TPS customers than for DCS customers (94 per cent compared to 88 per cent). Only five per cent of TPS customers and ten per cent of DCS customers said that they were dissatisfied with the service.

While overall satisfaction is an important performance metric, the survey also included a number of other items that can be used as measures to evaluate the service as a whole. Customers were asked how much improvement the service needed to make and a no improvement response

can be a good measure of differentiating high performance, 52 per cent TPS customers and 42 per cent DCS customers said the services needed no improvements at all.

In addition to this, it was also possible to look at customers' expectations alongside their satisfaction with the service. This again helps to differentiate performance at the high end; 32 per cent TPS customers and 24 per cent DCS customers were 'delighted'.

DWP has a Customer Charter which measures aspects of customer service. Four key drivers of satisfaction have been identified as important to customers against which the DWP tracks its performance. Scores were highest for Right treatment driver at 86 per cent. Right Result scored 80 per cent with Easy Access and On Time scoring lower at 74 per cent and 73 per cent respectively.

The performance measure of staff behaviour achieved outstanding results, often exceeding the overall satisfaction results. In both services, around 98 per cent respondents stated staff were polite, respectful and listened to what customers had to say. The positive views of staff were also echoed when customers were asked to say what they felt was the best thing about the service. The staff were the number one area that was mentioned for both services, identified by twice as many customers as the next area.

When it came to areas for improvement, the two services differed. For DCS customers, the number one area that needs improving was the quality of forms and paperwork – this was mentioned spontaneously by over a quarter of all customers. By contrast, the number one area for improvement for TPS customers

was providing information, mentioned by around one in five customers.

Enquiry types

The PDCS customer survey identified the customer's most recent contact with the service and then looked at all the interactions they had over the course of that enquiry. The most common enquiry type for TPS customers was to claim the State Pension (38 per cent). This was followed by claiming Pension Credit (PC) (20 per cent), notification of change of circumstances (17 per cent) and a query (18 per cent).

For DCS customers, the most common enquiry type was to a claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) (36 per cent). This was followed by claims for Attendance Allowance (AA) (19 per cent), Carer's Allowance (CA) (15 per cent), changes of circumstance (14 per cent) and general queries (11 per cent).

Customers were asked what contact channels they had used as part of their enquiry and telephone was the most common for both TPS (83 per cent) and DCS customers (63 per cent). DCS customers were, however, almost twice as likely to report having written to the service. For both services, the overwhelming majority of customers were happy with the contact channels they had used for their most recent enquiry.

Telephone communication

Around half of all customers said their most recent enquiry required two or more calls before it was resolved and the average number of telephone contacts was 2.4 for TPS customers and 2.3 for DCS customers. The number of calls varied by enquiry type with TPS customers claiming PC making an average of 3.2 calls and DCS customers claiming DLA making an average of 2.9 calls.

Three-quarters of PDCS customers reported that the first person they spoke to over the telephone was able to answer their query. For those who had to speak to a new person, eight in ten customers found

it necessary to repeat some information, with over half finding that they had to repeat all information.

Overall satisfaction levels were higher for PDCS customers who felt that they were given enough time to explain their situation and for those who were told what would happen next with their enquiry.

Written communication

Written communication was less prevalent than telephone contact for the most recent enquiry that customers had made. A fifth of DCS customers (20 per cent) and one in eight TPS customers (12 per cent) wrote to PDCS as part of their most recent enquiry. The average number of contacts for customers who had written to the service was also lower than for telephone contacts at 1.6 for DCS customers and 1.8 for TPS customers. For TPS customers, the number of contacts varied significantly by enquiry type with, at one end, changes of circumstances incurring very little correspondence (on average 1.2 contacts) while at the other, general queries generated more than twice that amount (on average 2.7 contacts). For DCS customers, the average number of contacts did not vary as significantly by enquiry type ranging from 1.3 contacts for AA claims and 1.8 contacts for claims for other benefits.

The majority of customers who wrote to PDCS were expecting a reply of some kind (90 per cent), and while nine in ten DCS customers then received one (90 per cent), only three-quarters of TPS customers did (76 per cent). When replies were received, most customers found them easy to understand (89 per cent).

Three-quarters of DCS customers and three-fifths of TPS customers submitted a form as part of their most recent enquiry. Nine in ten TPS customers found the form easy to complete compared with half of DCS customers. Over half of DCS customers and two-fifths of TPS customers had received help when completing a form as part of their most recent enquiry.

Enquiry conclusion

Customers were asked whether their enquiry had taken longer than expected and around one in five (18 per cent) said that it had. In addition to this, customers were asked whether PDCS had done what they said they would over the course of their enquiry and the overwhelming majority said that they had (92 per cent).

Half of TPS (54 per cent) and three-quarters of DCS customers (73 per cent) said that their enquiry required the service to make a decision based on their personal circumstances. Ninety per cent felt that the decision was clearly explained to them (90 per cent).

The survey also looked at issues around communication with the service over the course of the enquiry. Only a very small proportion of customers (seven per cent) said that they found it difficult to get in contact with either agency and nearly half said that it was very easy to get in contact with them (49 per cent). The picture was slightly less positive when it came to communication from the service to the customer in terms of the information they received. Around one in six customers (15 per cent) said that the service did not provide them with clear timings about what they would do and around a quarter (24 per cent) said that they were not kept up to date with the progress of their enquiry.

Customers were also asked how complex they had found the enquiry process and whether or not it was more or less complicated than they were expecting. Here there were marked differences between TPS and DCS customers, with the latter more likely to report additionally complex contacts, while nearly twice as many DCS customers as TPS customers said that their enquiry was more complicated than they had been expecting (14 per cent compared to eight per cent).

The Kano model of satisfaction

The use of statistical techniques when analysing customer surveys can serve to identify which factors

above all others impact on how customers feel about the service. In analysing the data from the PDCS customer survey, the Kano model has been used to look at how different service elements interact with satisfaction identifying them as either 'hygiene' factors, 'performance' factors or 'attractive' factors.

The 'hygiene' factors are those elements which might be taken for granted as part of the service and where they performed poorly this led to dissatisfaction.

The 'performance' factors are the aspects of service where a poor performance results in dissatisfaction and good performance increases satisfaction.

The 'attractive' factors are those aspects which will increase satisfaction, but their absence doesn't lead directly to dissatisfaction.

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