

DWP claimant service and experience survey 2012

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Background and objectives

These findings are based on data from a telephone survey carried out between May and July 2012, with 7,022 people claiming unemployment, disability, carer or pension-related benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The survey's main objective was to monitor claimants' satisfaction with DWP service delivery and ensure that the claimant voice is heard when it comes to operational and policy planning.

Prior to 2012, satisfaction with service delivery was assessed using two separate surveys: one amongst customers of Jobcentre Plus and a second amongst customers of the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service. The two bodies ceased to have formal executive agency status in October 2011, and the surveys were amalgamated to reflect this change in DWP's operational structure. The 2012 survey, therefore, incorporates the views and experience of claimants (or their appointees) of: Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA), Carer's Allowance (CA), State Pension (SP), and Pension Credit (PC). All respondents had contact with DWP in the six months before they were interviewed.

Each interview tracked the progress of a single transaction the claimant undertook, collecting feedback about the communication channels used, the volume of contact made, the clarity of DWP's communication during the process, and the length and outcome of the transaction. The rest of the interview covered claimants' more general experiences and impressions of DWP services and staff, accrued within the six months prior to interview.

Overall performance

DWP's performance in 2012 was characterised by high satisfaction levels. Over eight in ten claimants on disability, carer or unemployment benefits (83 per cent) and more than nine in ten claimants on pension-related benefits (92 per cent) reported that they were satisfied with DWP's service overall. Recipients of SP were the most satisfied (93 per cent), while those claiming ESA were the least satisfied (75 per cent).

There was very little variation in satisfaction levels amongst people claiming the same benefit, with few perceptible differences along demographic or geographical lines. Most notably, ESA and JSA claimants with a degree reported lower satisfaction than their counterparts with fewer or no qualifications. Having a limiting disability was also linked to lower satisfaction: amongst ESA, IS and DLA claimants and their appointees; those with a limiting disability were less likely to be satisfied than those without an illness or condition expected to last for 12 months or more.

Few claimants reported receiving a worse service from DWP than they had anticipated. Proportions ranged from six per cent amongst recipients of pension-related benefits, to 15 per cent amongst recipients of disability or carer benefits. DLA and ESA claimants were the most likely to describe the service as falling below their expectations (18 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively).

Claimants were also asked how much improvement they believed the service required as an alternative way of assessing the quality of the service. Unsurprisingly, there was a close association between satisfaction and the perceived need for

improvement, but the latter was also contingent on how claimants felt the service performed relative to their expectations. A call for 'huge improvement' was almost twice as common amongst dissatisfied claimants who felt let down by the service as those who already had an expectation of receiving a poor service.

Over seven in ten claimants of unemployment benefits (72 per cent) believed that the service provided by DWP needed improvement. This belief was less widespread amongst claimants receiving disability or carer benefits (64 per cent), and even less common amongst claimants on pension-related benefits (46 per cent).

Suggestions for improvements were collected from a random selection of respondents. While most suggestions related to staff, paradoxically staff was also commonly cited as the best feature of DWP's service. The fact that staff were viewed by so many claimants as an aspect of the service which requires attention, but also as one of the best elements of the service, suggests that staff performance may be inconsistent.

A series of agreement questions was asked regarding the staff's professionalism, attitudes and treatment of claimants. The findings indicate that claimants had a very positive perception of the staff's professionalism, especially their fairness, which was recognised by around nine in ten claimants in receipt of disability and carer benefits (89 per cent) or unemployment benefits (87 per cent), and almost universally acknowledged amongst those claiming pension-related benefits (95 per cent). At least three-quarters of claimants attributed staff with three other aspects of professionalism: helpfulness; the ability and willingness to provide correct information; and knowledge. While the staff's manner and conduct towards claimants was generally well-regarded, the proportion of claimants who believed the staff were understanding or sympathetic was smaller, with only around three-quarters of those in receipt of disability, carer or unemployment benefits reporting that staff had shown understanding for their particular circumstances or sympathy for their needs in the last six months.

The drivers of satisfaction

Logistic regression was used to derive the factors driving claimants' satisfaction and disappointment with the service provided by DWP. Analysing these drivers through the framework of the Kano model allows us to identify which are 'performance' factors which drive both satisfaction and disappointment, 'hygiene' factors which can lead to disappointment if missing, but which will not contribute to higher satisfaction if done well, and 'delight' factors which can lead to higher satisfaction if present, but which will not lead to disappointment if they are not delivered.

Recognising which service elements are linked to satisfaction or disappointment is a valuable step in determining the areas of service delivery which would benefit from improvement. However, even factors which have a strong relationship with satisfaction may only apply to a small proportion of claimants, and addressing these factors may have a minimal impact on perceptions of the service across the broader claimant population, or on cost savings or operational efficiency across DWP. It is, therefore, important to take prevalence into account when considering each factor.

The models revealed two aspects of the service which had the potential to delight claimants of all types, whether they were on disability, carer, pension-related or unemployment benefits: answering phones within a reasonable time, and informing claimants about other possible entitlements. There were no negative repercussions when DWP failed to deliver these, but when they were offered as part of the service claimants tended to feel very satisfied.

The models uncovered a range of additional 'hygiene and 'delight' factors which applied only to some categories of claimant and not others:

For claimants on disability or carer benefits, three key causes of disappointment were: transactions requiring more than three months to resolve; treatment by staff which was perceived as unhelpful; and the receipt of incorrect information. Delivery of

these service elements does not have the capacity to increase satisfaction, but ensuring claimants are not let down in these ways may prevent disappointment. These factors were, therefore, classified as ‘hygiene’ factors. Other elements of service delivery are not taken for granted and, therefore, present DWP with the opportunity to delight claimants. ‘Delight’ factors include: the simplification of forms and processes; and the provision of clear timings during claimants’ transactions.

People in receipt of pension-related benefits had slightly different priorities. Amongst the causes of disappointment for these claimants were: DWP’s failure to carry out something that was previously agreed; experiencing difficulties in getting in touch; feeling obliged to make contact three or more times to complete a transaction; the absence of progress updates; or the perception that staff were not helpful. Since claimants view these as essential elements of good service delivery, improving these aspects of the service would not drive up satisfaction, but could prevent disappointment. Potential ways of delighting claimants include: resolving transactions within two weeks; and resolving telephone transactions without the use of transference or call-backs.

For claimants in receipt of unemployment benefits, one of the strongest drivers of disappointment was DWP’s failure to carry out agreed actions. The

perception of unfair treatment or unequal access to services, and a poor understanding of the processes and steps involved in their transactions with DWP also led to disappointment. Whilst addressing these elements of the service can prevent disappointment, two ways of delighting claimants would be: ensuring that staff treat them with politeness and respect; and providing adequate reassurance that benefit payments are correct.

In addition to the above, various aspects of the service provided by DWP appear to boost satisfaction when present, but create disappointment when absent. While these ‘performance’ factors vary between claimant types, there are two factors which help to determine satisfaction levels for claimants of all types: DWP’s perceived trustworthiness. Claimants who felt DWP could be trusted to carry out procedures correctly and to inform claimants about other possible entitlements were more likely to feel ‘very satisfied’ with the service, while claimants who did not trust DWP in these respects were not only less likely to say they were ‘very satisfied’, but more inclined to be disappointed. This finding suggests that claimants’ perception of service delivery is not dependent solely on the quality of its processes and procedures, or the abilities and attitudes of its staff, but also on DWP’s brand image.

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

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