

Property Services (DVS) Customer survey: Findings 2014/15

Prepared by BMG Research



Valuation Office Agency

Main Findings

- Almost all (94 per cent) of customers were satisfied with their most recent dealings with DVS, including seven in ten (69 per cent) who were very satisfied, a significant increase on 2013/14. Only 4 per cent were dissatisfied.
- Customer satisfaction with all aspects of performance was high, ranging from 89 per cent to 97 per cent, while the proportion who were very satisfied ranged from 53 per cent to 82 per cent.
- Satisfaction with the professionalism of staff and their independence/impartiality was particularly high (82 per cent and 80 per cent respectively very satisfied).
- Over four in five (85 per cent) respondents reported that DVS delivered their work within the originally agreed timescales, while less than one in ten (9 per cent) reported that they did not.
- Nine in ten (90 per cent) reported that DVS delivered the work within the originally agreed budget, whilst only one in twenty (4 per cent) reported that they did not.
- When asked if there were any aspects of the DVS service that caused them concerns or issues, speed of response/meeting deadlines and the capacity/availability of staff were the two most commonly mentioned issues (9 per cent and 7 per cent respectively). However it should be noted that, overall, respondents were more than twice as likely to mention something about the DVS service that particularly impressed them rather than concerns or issues (69 per cent compared with 29 per cent).

About this release: This report has been written by BMG Research, based on research carried out in August 2014 to April 2015. The views and findings expressed in the report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).

This report summarises the annual results from the 2014/2015 Property Services (known externally as DVS) Customer survey, undertaken on behalf of the VOA, and makes comparison with the 2013/2014 results where relevant.

DVS is the specialist property arm of the VOA, and provides professional property advice to clients from across the public sector.

Interviews were undertaken using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI), with customers who have had personal dealings with DVS within the last two years.

For all tables, to protect confidentiality counts are rounded to the nearest 10. Counts of zero are reported as "0" and counts derived from fewer than five responses are reported as negligible and denoted by "**". Charts do not show data based on fewer than five responses. Data is shown unweighted.

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Summary of results

Dealings with DVS

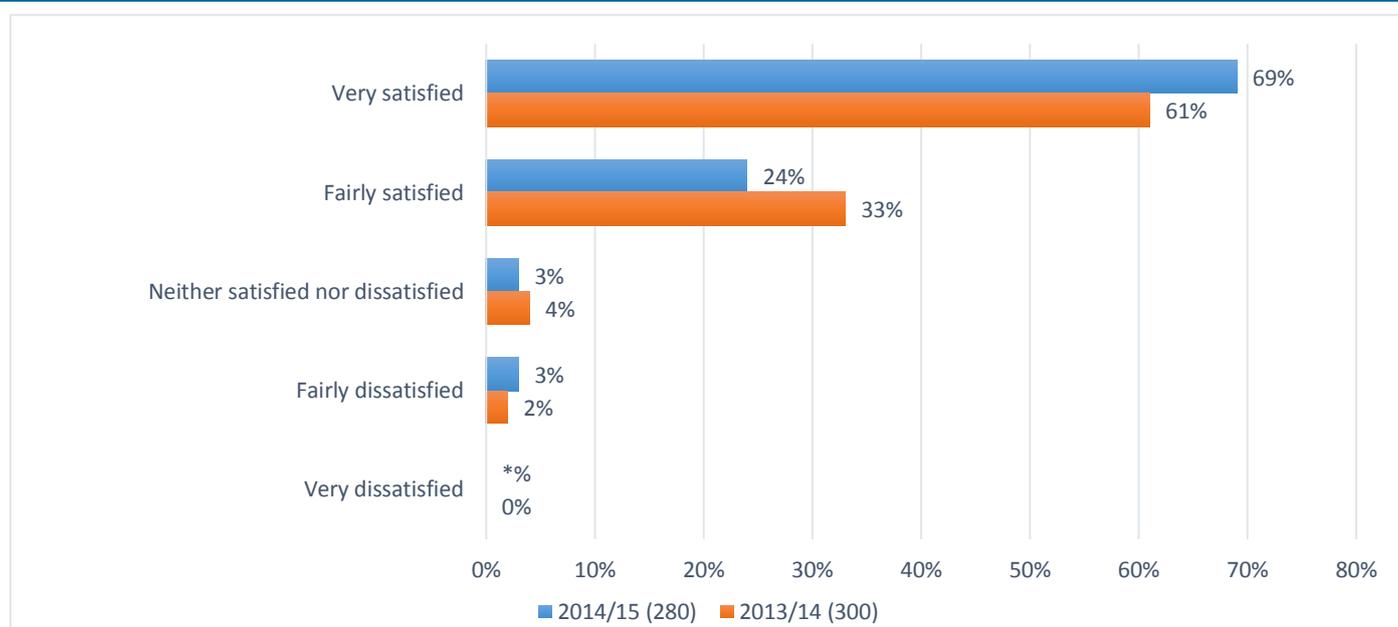
At the time of interview, 26 per cent of all respondents had dealt with DVS in the last week, and in total 61 per cent in the last three months.

Close to four in five (78 per cent) respondents had used DVS on more than one previous occasion, 7 per cent had used DVS once before and for around one in seven (15 per cent) this was their first occasion.

Overall rating of current/most recent contact with DVS

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall service they received in their current or most recent contract. As was the case in 2013/14, over nine in ten (94 per cent) respondents rated themselves as satisfied overall. There has been a significant increase in the proportion rating themselves as very satisfied, from 61 per cent (of all respondents) in 2013/14 to 69 per cent in 2014/15. Just 4 per cent of respondents indicated that they were either fairly or very dissatisfied.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with overall service received in current/most recent contract with DVS – (all respondents)



Q4. I'm going to read out some aspects relating to DVS' work for you. Could you please rate how satisfied you were with their performance on each one in your current or most recent contract? *Overall service you received.*

Rounded bases in parentheses

Satisfaction with aspects of DVS' performance

Figure 2 illustrates the extent to which customers were satisfied or dissatisfied with various aspects of DVS' performance in their current/most recent contact, ranked on the proportion rating themselves as very satisfied. The figures to the right of the bar chart represent the proportion who rated themselves as very satisfied with each aspect in 2013/14.

Total satisfaction was high across all aspects, with the proportion who were very or fairly satisfied ranging from 89 per cent to 97 per cent.

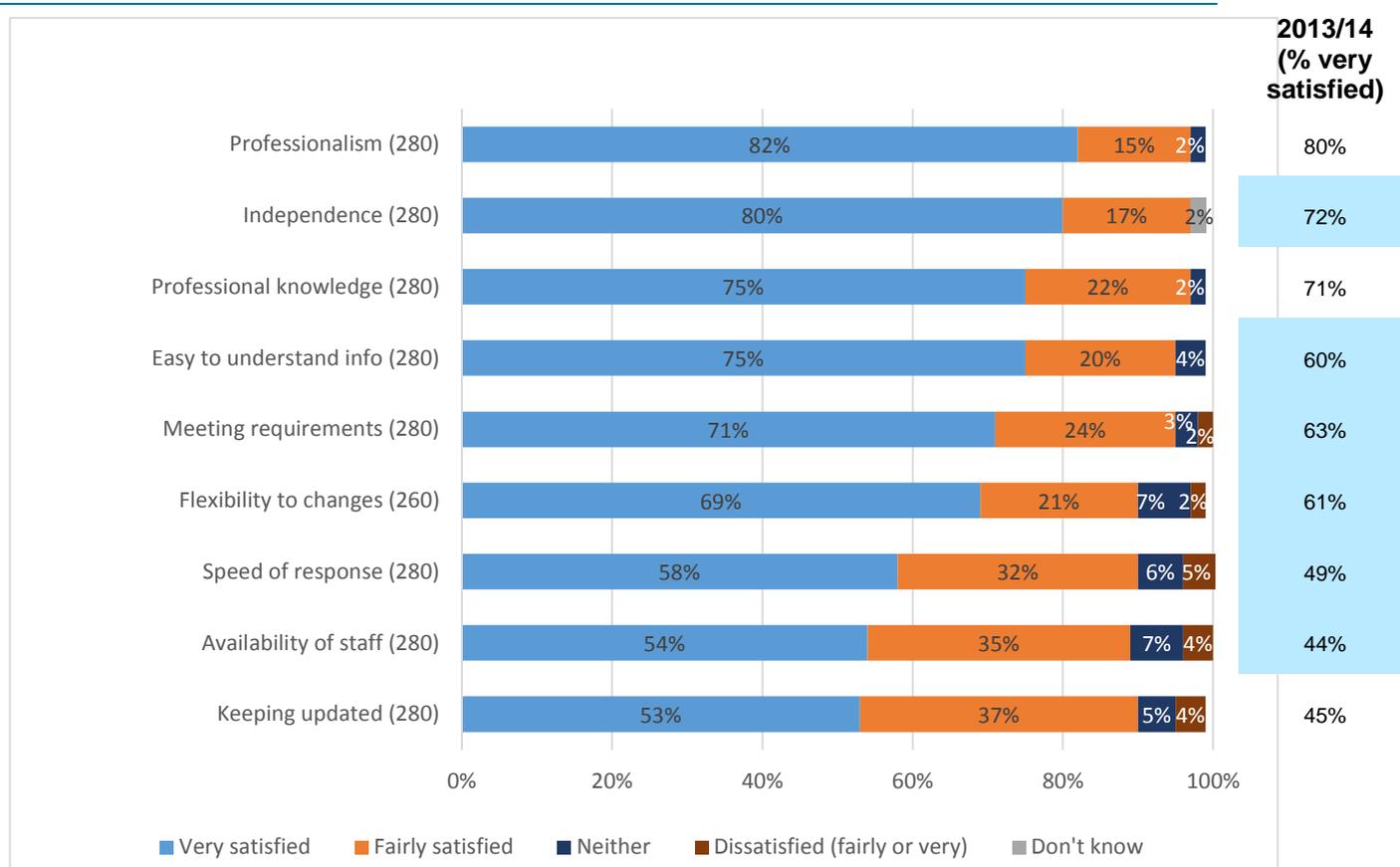
Satisfaction was particularly high in relation to the professionalism of staff (82 per cent very satisfied) and their independence and impartiality (80 per cent very satisfied).

Very few respondents indicated dissatisfaction, although 4 per cent to 5 per cent were dissatisfied with

being kept updated on the progress of work, the availability of staff and the speed of response to queries.

While overall levels of satisfaction have been mostly consistent over time, the proportion of customers saying they were very satisfied has increased significantly year-on-year for many aspects (independence and impartiality; information easy to understand; meeting key requirements; flexibility of staff to changes in requirements; speed of response to queries; and availability of staff), as highlighted in Figure 2 by shading in the far right column.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with aspects of DVS' performance (excludes not applicable)



Q4. I'm now going to ask you to rate how satisfied you were with various aspects of DVS' performance, in relation to your current or most recent contract. I'm going to read out some aspects relating to DVS' work for you. Could you please rate how satisfied you were with their performance on each one in your current or most recent contract, using the scale of...?
 Rounded bases in parentheses

More than four in five (85 per cent) respondents reported that DVS delivered the work within the originally agreed timescales, while less than one in ten (9 per cent) reported that they did not, and in two thirds (65 per cent) of these cases the changes in the agreed timescales were fully explained and agreed.

Overall nine in ten (90 per cent) respondents reported that DVS delivered the work within the originally agreed budget, whilst only one in twenty (4 per cent) said that they did not (the remainder did not know). Where the work was not completed within the agreed budget, half (although this equates to just 5 respondents) reported that changes to the original cost of the work were not fully explained or agreed.

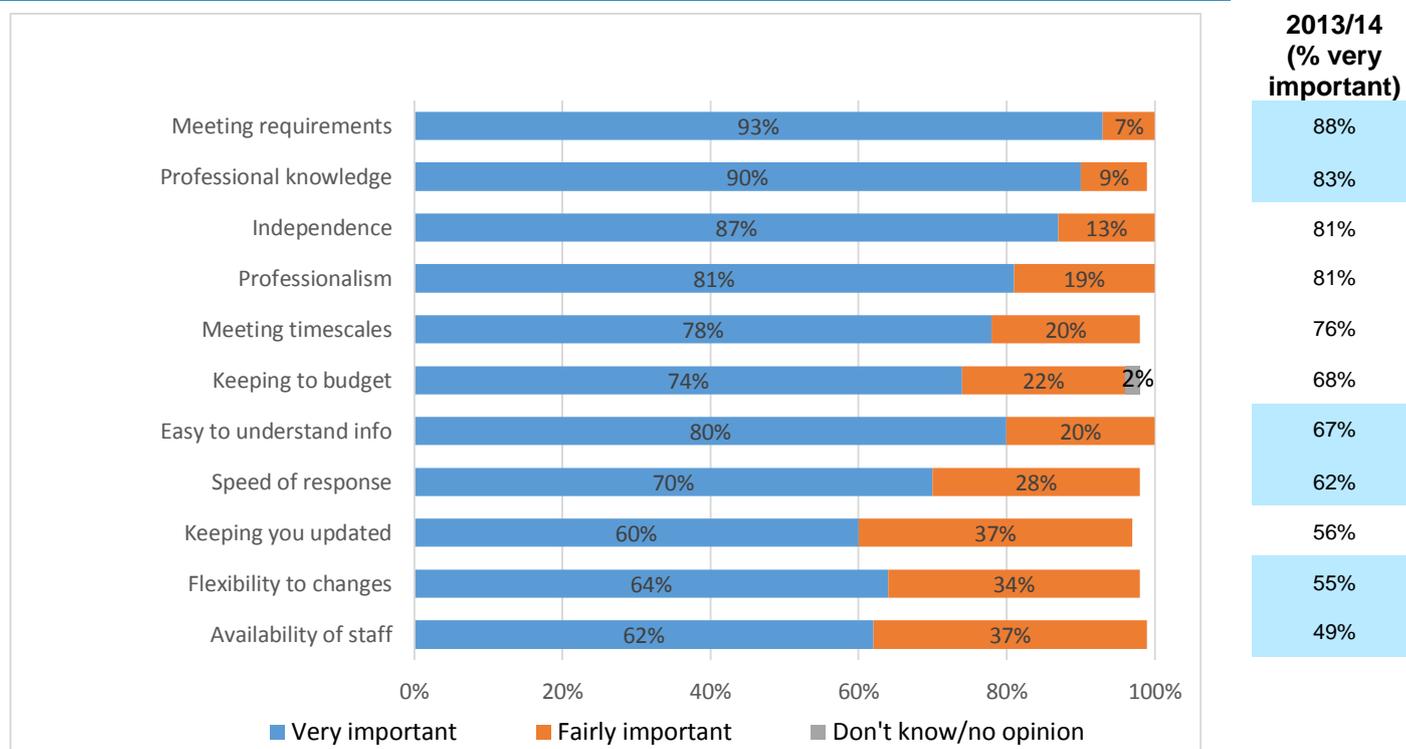
Perceived importance of aspects of DVS' performance

Customers were also asked to rate how important they feel various aspects of DVS' performance are, and the figure below shows that almost no respondents identified any of the aspects as unimportant to any

extent.

The most important aspect of DVS' performance was identified as meeting key requirements (93 per cent considered this very important), however very large proportions also felt that the professional knowledge of staff (90 per cent), their independence and impartiality (87 per cent) and their professionalism (81 per cent) were very important.

Figure 3: Perceived importance of aspects of DVS' performance – 2014/15 (all respondents)



Q9. I'm now going to ask you to rate these aspects of performance in terms of how important they are to you. For each one, could you please say whether you think they are...?

Rounded Base = 280

Extent of improvement

Three quarters (76 per cent) of respondents felt that, compared to their previous experiences over the last two years, the service they received the last time they used DVS services had stayed the same. While one in twenty (4 per cent) felt it had worsened, this is a significantly lower proportion than was the case in 2013/14 (8 per cent). In contrast, one in five (19 per cent) felt that it had improved.

Of the 19 per cent of respondents who felt that the service had improved, the main reasons mentioned were:

- More approachable/better relationship (26 per cent of those observing an improvement);
- Faster response (19 per cent);
- More familiar/improved understanding (16 per cent);
- Communication/keep informed (16 per cent);
- Staff (14 per cent).

When asked if there were any aspects of the DVS service that particularly impressed them, seven in ten (69 per cent) mentioned something, with the following key themes coming through:

- Speed of response/meeting deadlines (15 per cent of all respondents);
- Professionalism/reputation (14 per cent);
- Knowledge/understanding/experience (12 per cent);
- Helpfulness/approachability (11 per cent);
- Good service (general) (10 per cent);
- Positive comments about individual/working relationship (8 per cent);
- Flexibility (6 per cent).

In contrast, when asked if there were any specific aspects of the DVS service that caused them concerns or issues, three in ten (29 per cent) mentioned something, with the following themes coming through:

- Speed of response/meeting deadlines (9 per cent of all respondents);
- Capacity/availability of staff (7 per cent);
- Ease of contact (4 per cent);
- Pricing (3 per cent).

Over nine in ten (95 per cent) of all respondents said they would consider commissioning future work from DVS. Given this, it is unsurprising that close to half of respondents (47 per cent) were unable to mention anything that would increase the likelihood of them commissioning services in the future.

As was the case in 2013/14, the most common issue identified here was price/value for money, mentioned by one in seven (14 per cent) respondents.

Multivariate analysis (Key driver analysis)

The aspects of performance that are most important in predicting levels of overall satisfaction (its 'key drivers') were explored through statistical analysis.

To maximise the robustness of the analysis, results from all 10 waves undertaken so far – covering research from Q3 2012-13 to Q4 2014-15 - have been included.

Further technical description of the process of Key Driver Analysis is provided in Appendix 2.

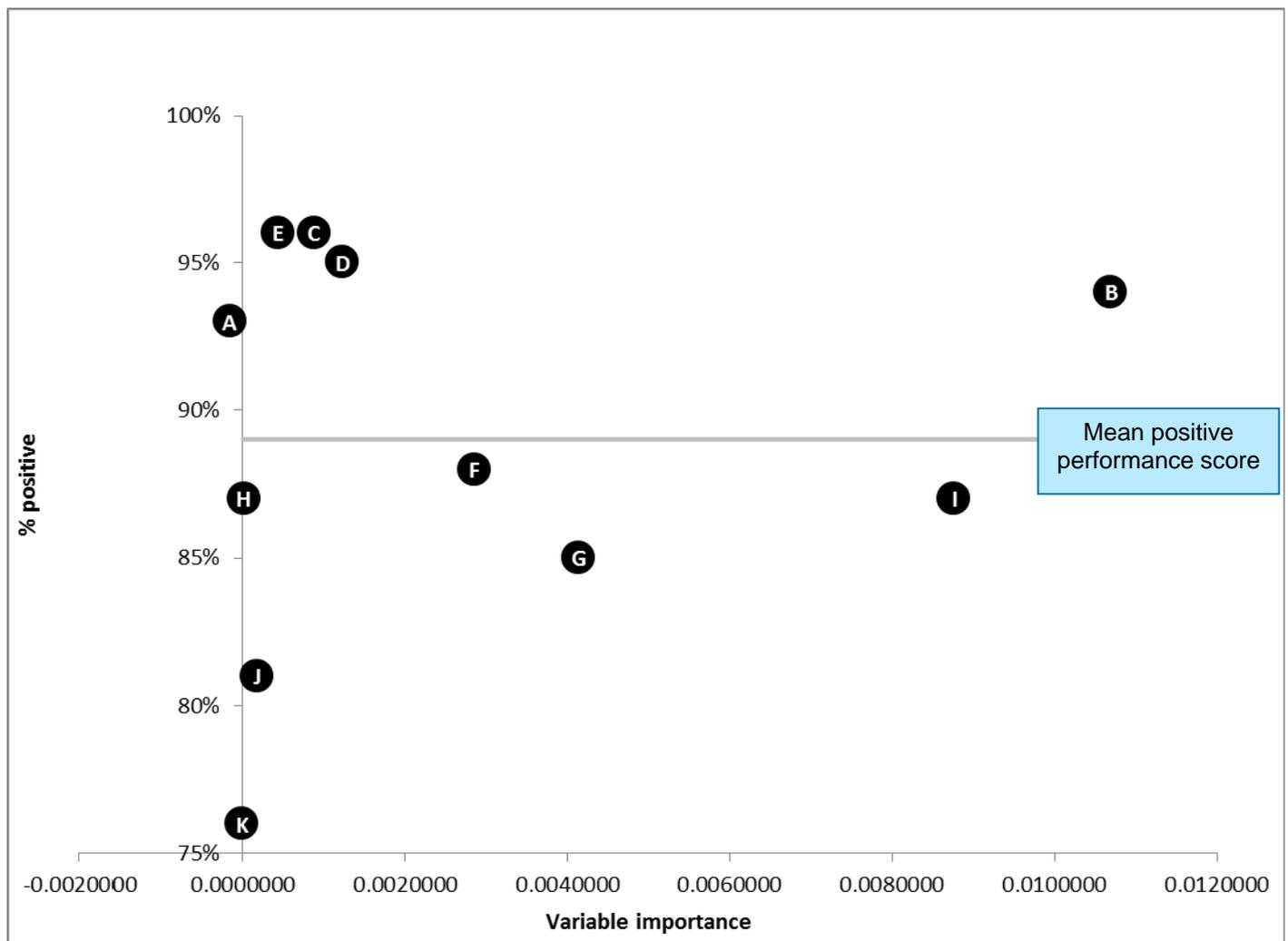
Figure 4 summarises the results from this analysis, which considers a range of variables relating to performance and their relationship with the outcome measure of 'overall satisfaction'.

The figure shows the statistical importance of each performance aspect plotted along the horizontal axis. The vertical axis indicates the extent to which DVS is rated positively on each performance aspect, with the line parallel to the horizontal axis representing the mean positive score.

This analysis indicates that the most important predictor of overall satisfaction is 'meeting key requirements', and that this is an aspect on which DVS performs more strongly than the average in terms of overall levels of satisfaction.

In contrast, other important predictors of overall satisfaction are 'speed of response to queries', and 'keeping you updated on progress of work', and DVS performs less well on these than on some other aspects.

Figure 4: Overview of multivariate analysis



Key	
A	Providing information that is easy to understand
B	Meeting your key requirements
C	Independence and impartiality
D	Professional knowledge of DVS staff
E	Professionalism of staff
F	Flexibility of DVS staff to adapt to changes in your requirements
G	Keeping you updated on progress of work
H	Availability of staff when you wanted to get in contact with them
I	Speed of response to queries
J	Did DVS deliver the work within the originally agreed timescales
K	Did DVS deliver the work within the originally agreed budget

Case study

The case study below exemplifies the generally very positive views of the DVS team:

An estate officer, whose most recent dealing with DVS was within the last 6 months, and who has used DVS on more than one occasion within the last 2 years.

They were very satisfied with all aspects of the service they received, which was delivered on time and within the originally agreed budget.

They particularly valued the helpfulness, knowledge and professionalism of the staff they dealt with, who they regarded as fully meeting their requirements.

Though they felt the service they received had remained consistent over the last 2 years as opposed to showing improvement, they were unable to mention any aspect of DVS performance that would increase their likelihood of commissioning DVS in the future.

Background Notes

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an executive Agency of HMRC. Its purpose is “to provide the valuations and property advice required to support taxation and benefits”¹ in England and Wales. Property Services (known externally as DVS) is the property arm of the VOA, and provides professional property advice to clients from across the public sector.

¹VOA Annual Report 2015: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuation-office-agency-annual-report-and-accounts-2014-to-2015>

Methodology

Interviews were undertaken between August 2014 and April 2015 using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI), with customers who have had personal dealings with PS within the last two years, the majority within the last two months.

The sample was provided by VOA, and a total of 281 interviews were completed from 567 contacts supplied, representing a 50 per cent response rate. Targets were set to ensure a representative spread across customer types. Figure 5 shows the customer breakdown achieved over the year 14/15.

Table 1: Breakdown of achieved sample by customer type (rounded totals)

Income group	Sector	2013/14	2014/15
Less than £1000	CS Central Government	*	*
	CS Health	10	20
	CS Local/Devolved Government	20	40
	CS Other	*	10
	CS Transport	0	0
	SUB-TOTAL	40	70
£1000 to £5000	CS Central Government	*	10
	CS Health	60	40
	CS Local/Devolved Government	110	100
	CS Other	20	20
	CS Transport	*	*
	SUB-TOTAL	200	170
Greater than £5000	CS Central Government	*	10
	CS Health	20	10
	CS Local/Devolved Government	40	20
	CS Other	*	*
	CS Transport	*	10
	SUB-TOTAL	70	40
Grand Total		300	280

A sample size of 280 carries a maximum confidence interval of approximately ± 5 per cent at the 95 per cent level of confidence, although the size of this confidence interval reduces as the proportion of respondents giving an answer gets closer to 0 per cent or 100 per cent.

Differences between quarters/years and between subgroups have been indicated at the 95 per cent level of confidence, i.e. where we can be 95 per cent confident that the differences are real and did not occur by chance.

Appendix 1: Overview of results (all respondents)

To protect confidentiality, cells derived from values of less than 5 have been suppressed, denoted with a “*”.

Cells may not sum due to rounding.

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Overall rating of service received	69%	24%	3%	4%	0%
Satisfaction with performance (excludes 'not applicable')	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Professionalism of staff	82%	15%	2%	*	*
Independence and impartiality	80%	17%	*	0%	2%
Professional knowledge of DVS staff	75%	22%	2%	*	*
Providing information that is easy to understand	75%	20%	4%	*	0%
Meeting your key requirements	71%	24%	3%	2%	0%
Flexibility of DVS staff to adapt to changes in your requirements	69%	21%	7%	2%	*
Speed of response to queries	58%	32%	6%	5%	0%
Availability of staff when you wanted to get in contact with them	54%	35%	7%	4%	*
Keeping you updated on progress of work	53%	37%	5%	4%	*
Timings and budget		Yes		No	Don't know
Completed within agreed timescales		85%		9%	5%
Work delivered within agreed budget		90%		4%	7%
Importance of elements of performance	Very important	Fairly important	Neither	Unimportant	Don't know
Meeting your key requirements	93%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Professional knowledge of DVS staff	90%	9%	*	0%	0%
Independence and impartiality	87%	13%	0%	0%	0%
Professionalism of staff	81%	19%	0%	0%	0%
Meeting agreed timescales	78%	20%	*	0%	*
Keeping to agreed budget	74%	22%	*	0%	2%
Providing information that is easy to understand	80%	20%	*	*	0%
Speed of response to queries	70%	28%	*	0%	*
Keeping you updated on progress of work	60%	37%	*	*	*

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Flexibility of DVS staff to adapt to changes in your requirements	64%	34%	*	0%	*
Availability of staff when you wanted to get in contact with them	62%	37%	*	*	0%
Comparison to previous experience (had dealings in last 2 years)		Improved	Same	Worse	Don't know
Improvement		19%	76%	4%	*

Appendix 2: Technical note on Key Driver Analysis

Key Driver Analysis was conducted using random forest modelling. This statistical technique searches through all predictor variables, and potential splits between predictor variable categories, to determine which combination best predicts the outcome variable.

During this process splits may occur where the predictor response does not match the outcome response ('misclassification' at different stages), so most models are compiled using randomly selected subsets of the sample ('bootstrapping').

From these models the variables which have the lowest level of misclassification are determined, i.e. those that most accurately predict the outcome variable under a wide range of circumstances.

The variable importance measure that is produced is dependent on the type of random forest model used, conditional vs. unconditional; and the difference between the two is how it best identifies splits in individual trees. For this analysis a conditional inference model was used.

Conditional inference models are computationally more intensive, but have twofold advantages:

- Predictor variables with more categories tend to be favoured in non-conditional models, as more detailed permutations are possible.
- Predictor variables may be highly correlated, in which case, it is likely that they share some inherent meaning. Whilst both correlated predictor variables are in the model, having conditional individual trees which include both, one or the other, or neither variable, helps to distinguish which is the more accurate predictor.

NB Respondents are originally split randomly, so running the model twice can produce marginally different variable importance scores. It is therefore important to run a random forest more than once, to check that the solution replicates itself. Multiple models were run with four or five different seed values (starting points for randomisation). If the variable importance rankings had been substantially different on a rerun, then a totally different model would have been pursued.

Use of Data

This publication is being released as part of a general drive towards making VOA data more accessible. The report will support the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Wales Government (WG) in carrying out its duties and the data will also be used to inform government policy, respond to Freedom of Information requests and to parliamentary questions as well as to conduct operational analyses to support the VOA.

Further Information

The 2013/14 annual report of the DVS Surveys is available at the following location:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/property-services-dvs-customer-survey-findings-2013-2014>