



Specialist Personal Tax Helplines Survey

Research Report No.275

Executive summary

HM Revenue and Customs telephony lines provide a national telephone service for dealing with enquiries from HMRC customers. An ongoing survey of customer contact centres has been in place since 2010 but it does not include specialist helplines run within HMRC. This report outlines findings from a survey of four Specialist Personal Tax Helplines; Charities, Trusts, IHT and Probate and Pensions. These helplines handle approximately 400,000 calls each year often concerning complex tax matters with customers ranging from individuals through to tax specialists. The survey ran over a three month period between October and December 2012. This is the first time that customers of Specialist Personal Tax Helplines have been surveyed in this way.

The main aim of this research is to measure the experience of customers using the Specialist Personal Tax Help lines in order for HMRC to better understand customers' needs and to provide information which can be used to improve overall customer experience. The survey questionnaire and methodology used was almost identical to the Contact Centre survey which is used to improve customer contact experience and to monitor departmental key performance indicators.

Overall customer experience

Overall scores for the Specialist Personal Tax Helplines were very positive:

- 92% of customers rated their experience as very good or fairly good.
- 91% were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their call.
- 95 % of customers said their experience was in line with or better than what they expected and of these 50% stated it was better than expected.

Ease of getting in touch

Overall, the majority of customers (85%) only had to call once before their call was answered by a helpline, 14% had to call two to three times, and only 1% had to call four or more times.

Nearly half of customers (46%) reported that they had to wait less than one minute before their call was answered, 31% stated they waited two to three minutes, 3% stated they had to wait more than ten minutes.

Most customers (87%) stated it was very or fairly easy to get in touch with the helpline.

First contact resolution

Three quarters (76%) of customers reported talking to an adviser once about their query, and 20% stated they spoke to an adviser two to three times. A total of 92% of customers reported that they considered the number of times they had to call as very acceptable or fairly acceptable.

Customers who called a helpline once were likely to rate the acceptability of the number of times they had to call higher than those who had called more than once (79% rating very acceptable compared to 50%).

Understanding what to do next

Most customers (88%) reported that they found it very easy or fairly easy to understand what they had to do next to resolve their query. A small minority (5%) reported they found it fairly or very difficult to know what to do next.

Advisers

Customers were very positive about the helpline advisers they spoke with. Key findings regarding advisers are:

- 97% of customers felt they were treated very well or fairly well, 86% of these thought they were treated very well.
- 95% of customers strongly agree or agree that the helpline adviser understood their query.
- 92% of customers found it very easy or fairly easy to understand the information provided by the helpline adviser.
- 90% of customers strongly agree or agree that the helpline adviser had the right level of expertise.

Improvements

More than half of customers (56%) stated that they did not consider any improvements were necessary. For those who suggested improvements, Table 2 below displays the key areas customers identified for improvement:

Table 2: Suggested improvements

Improvement	% of customers
Time taken to get through to helpline	15%
Better trained staff	10%
Greater consistency of information between helplines	4%
Faster follow up/ resolution of service	3%
Remove automated message at the start	3%
Not to be put on hold before speaking to an adviser	3%

The two most frequent areas where improvements were suggested were the time taken to get through to the helpline (15%) and better trained/more knowledgeable staff (10%).

Key Driver Analysis showed that the biggest influence on overall ratings of customer experience was how good or poor the helpline was at getting things right first time. As this dimension has lower performance ratings this is a primary area for improvement.

Introduction

1.1 Background and survey aims

HM Revenue and Customs telephony services provide a national telephone service for dealing with enquiries from HMRC customers. An ongoing survey of customer contact centres has been in place since 2010 but it does not include Specialist Personal Tax Helplines. This report outlines the findings of a survey of four Specialist Personal Tax customer helplines; Charities, Trusts, Probate and Inheritance Tax (IHT) and Pensions. Between them these helplines handle over 400,000 calls each year often concerning complex tax matters with customers ranging from individuals through to tax specialists. As helplines are at the frontline of HMRC's customer service their delivery and function is important to fulfil the business's vision for improving overall customer service.

The main aim of this research is to measure the overall performance of the four specialist helplines, to improve understanding of customer requirements and to meet HMRC's objectives to improve overall customer experience. HMRC commissioned TNS-BMRB to carry out the fieldwork for this work. The analysis was completed in-house.

1.2 Methodology

The target population for this survey was HMRC customers telephoning the Specialist Personal Tax Helplines.

The survey aimed to interview 300 callers from each helpline, 1,200 in total. Overall, 1143 interviews were completed. Each customer who called during a specified half day sampling slot was asked if they would be willing to take part in the survey. As the call volumes varied across the helplines, TNS-BMRB scheduled more sampling slots at the less busy helplines in order to collect the required sample. A total number of 81 randomly selected half day slots were allocated to the four helplines.

HMRC collected details of customers who called during these slots and then transferred the details of those willing to take part in the survey to TNS-BMRB on a fortnightly basis.

This was the first time that Specialist Personal Tax had carried out a survey of this kind and there were some issues with sample collection and the sample collected was below target rates for the two helplines; Probate and IHT and Pensions. Both helplines allocated more sampling time towards the end of the survey to compensate for the shortfall. This strategy successfully boosted sample collected but it also means the sample could be biased towards customer experience during the last few weeks of the survey.

Records were randomly selected for interview. Interviews were arranged within two weeks of receipt of the data transfer which enabled the contractor to conduct the survey while the caller's experience was still fresh in their mind.

During the fieldwork period, October to December 2012, 5,296 customers were asked to take part and 2,253 agreed to participate in the survey, representing a 43% participation rate. Of those agreeing to take part, 1,555 were randomly chosen for the survey but the contractor found they were unable to contact 5% of the 1,555 because their records contained inaccurate data. Hence, the survey consisted of an effective sample of 1,473 customers.

Table 3: Sampling attrition

	Number	Percentage (total)	Percentage (effective total)
Total sample issued	1,555	100%	N/A
Bad sample / wrong number	82	5%	N/A
Total effective sample	1,473	95%	100%
Total interviews conducted	1,143	74%	78%
Refusals	91	6%	6%
No contacts	239	15%	16%

From the effective sample 91 (6%) of callers refused to take part and 239 (15%) did not respond/were not contactable, leaving a final sample of 1143. Based on the effective sample the response rate was 78%.

The sample was weighted to compensate for variation in sampling probabilities. Further calibrations were applied based on call volume data provided by HMRC to remove design bias (oversampling of the helplines that receive fewer calls) and to ensure that each helpline was represented proportionately.

Results were collected for all four helplines. Sample figures for the four helplines are presented in Table 4 below:-

Table 4: Helpline samples

	Number	Weighted number
Charities	303	344
IHT and Probate	293	603
Trusts	307	116
Pensions	240	80

1.3 Coverage of the report

This report covers results for Specialist Personal Tax Helplines in 2012-13. As the sample was drawn from only a three month period during this year then there may be some seasonal variation for this particular period.

In this report any reference to the overall results includes results for all four lines of business sampled. The overall results are presented for all questions and a short summary of key differences between the individual helplines is presented later.

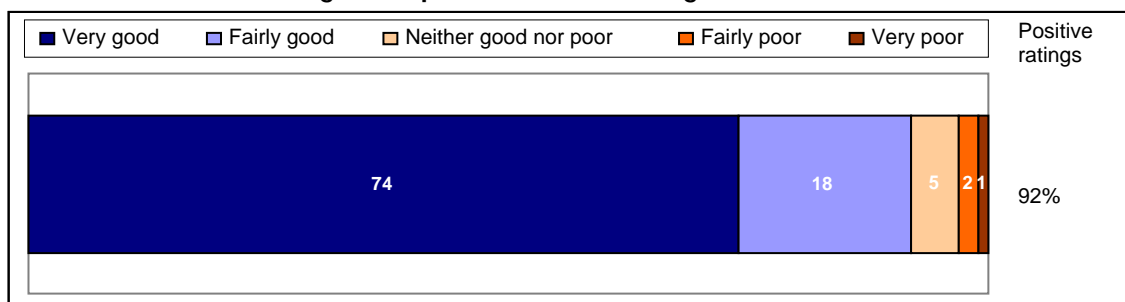
Most questions within the report are framed to have a five point response scale consisting of two positive categories, one neutral category and two negative categories. Where the report refers to positive ratings this terminology refers to the combined responses for the two positive categories. For example when customers are asked about their overall experience of contacting the helpline positive ratings refer to customers who stated their experience as very good or fairly good.

2 Customer experience

2.1 Overall rating of the experience of calling the helpline

Customers were asked to rate their overall experience of calling the helpline. The results were very positive with 92% of customers stating their experience was fairly good or very good, 74% of whom reported that their experience was very good.

Chart 1: Overall rating of experience of calling



Base size: 1143

2.1.2 Key Driver Analysis

Key Driver Analysis looks at which dimensions of customer experience drive the measure of overall experience. It uses multivariate analysis to produce a list of drivers and an indication of their relative importance. The importance and performance of each factor are plotted on a diagram and divided into quadrants using the median values. This allows us to identify areas where performance scores should be maintained and areas that could be improved to influence the overall service rating. The main focus for improvement should be the dimensions in the bottom right quadrant (high importance, low performance), followed by those in the bottom left quadrant (low importance, low performance). Factors in the top right quadrant (high importance, high performance) should be maintained.

The Key Driver Analysis in this report uses the full survey dataset (October to December 2012). The key drivers are ranked according to their relative importance in terms of overall rating of experience.

2.1.2 Key Driver Analysis Results

Table 5 below displays the relative drivers of overall customer experience, which are ranked in order of importance, the most important being at the top of the table.

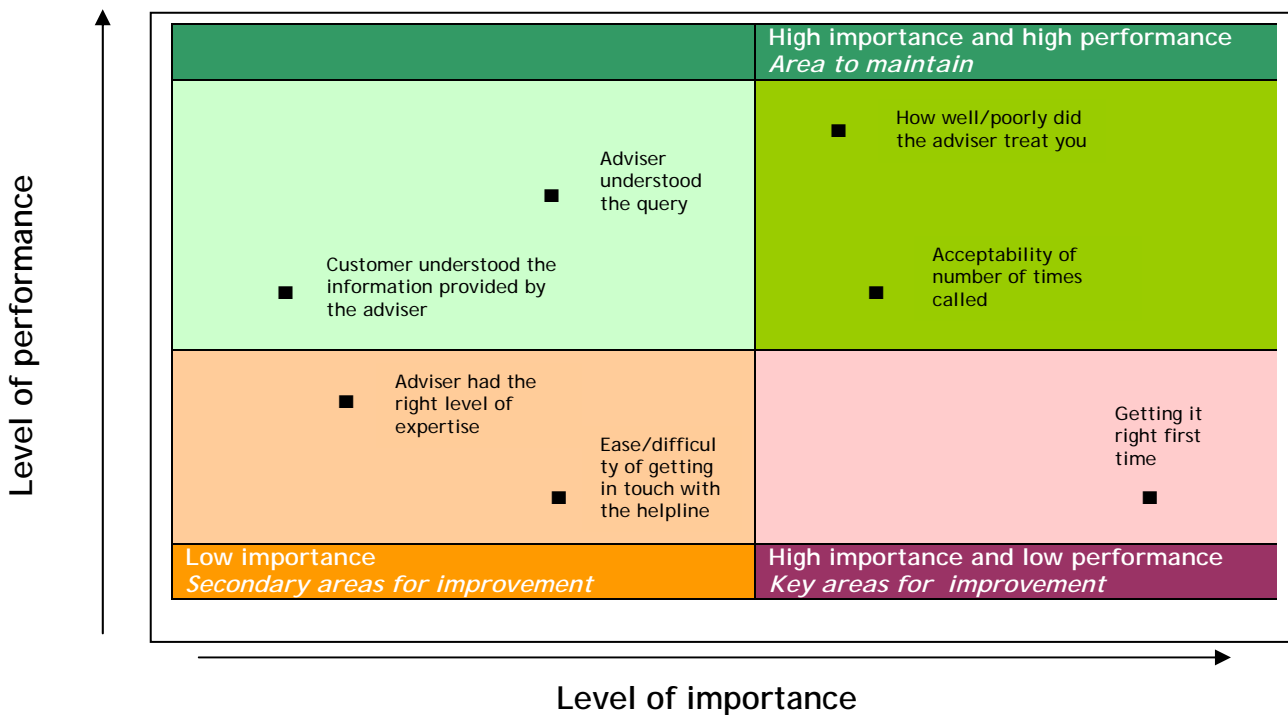
Table 5: The ranking of factors influencing overall experience

Factor	Importance Ranking	Performance Rating
How good or poor was the helpline at getting things right the first time	1	87%
How acceptable was the number of times you had to speak to an adviser about a particular issue	2	92%
How well or poorly did the helpline adviser treat you	3	92%
How easy or difficult to get in touch with the helpline	4	87%
How far you agree or disagree the helpline adviser understood your query	4	95%
How far you agree or disagree the helpline adviser had the right level of expertise	6	89%
How easy or difficult it was to understand the information provided by the adviser	7	94%

How good or poor the helpline was at getting things right first time had the highest influence on overall customer experience. The factor with the second highest influence was the acceptability around the number of times the customer had to call about an issue. Both these factors relate to similar issues. Factors relating to customer advisers performance were ranked as having a medium influence on overall experience (how well/poorly the customer adviser treated you and the adviser understanding the customer query) as was ease of getting in touch with the helpline.

Chart 2 shows importance against performance to highlight areas for potential for improvement.

Chart 2: The Key Driver Analysis Quadrant



The analysis shows the primary area for improvement was getting it right first time. This factor had the highest relative importance score yet performance was relatively lower than most of the other factors.

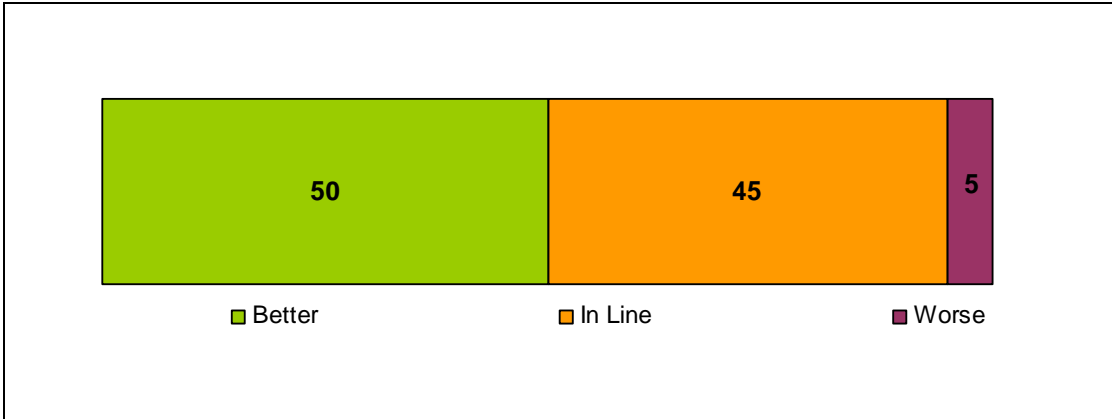
Two areas were shown to be of relatively high importance and high performance: how well/poorly did the adviser treat you and acceptability of the number of times called. These are areas where performance should be maintained.

The analysis revealed two secondary areas for improvement. Both ease/difficulty of getting in touch and advisers having the right level of expertise were relatively lower performing factors but their importance scores were also relatively lower.

2.2 Experience of calling the SPT helplines compared with expectations

Customers were asked whether their experience of calling the customer helpline was better, worse, or in line with expectations. Overall the results were positive with 95% saying it met or exceeded expectations (50% stated their experience was better than they expected) and 45% stating it was in line with their expectations.

Chart 3: Customers who stated their experience as better, in line, worse than expectations.



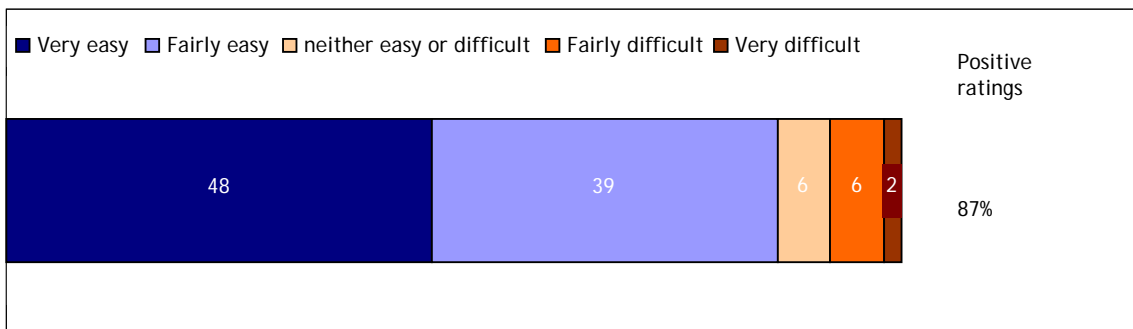
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3 Getting in touch with the helpline

3.1 Overall ease of getting in touch with the helpline

Customers were asked, overall how easy or difficult it was to get in touch with the helpline. The results were very positive with 87% of customers saying it was either very easy or fairly easy to get in touch with the helpline and of these 48% reported it was very easy to get in touch.

Chart 4: Ease of getting in touch with the helpline

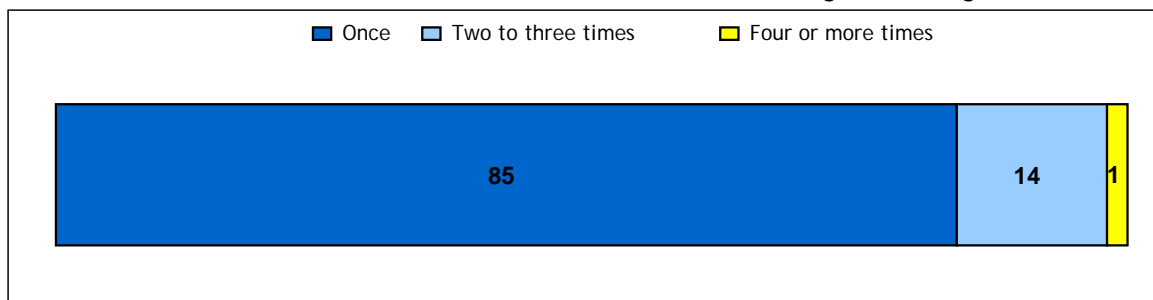


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3.2 Number of times customer called the helpline before being able to speak to an adviser

Customers were asked how many times they had called the helpline before their call was answered. The results showed that 85% of respondents only called once, with a further 14% of respondents who got through to the helplines after calling two to three times.

Chart 5: The number of times customers had to call to get through

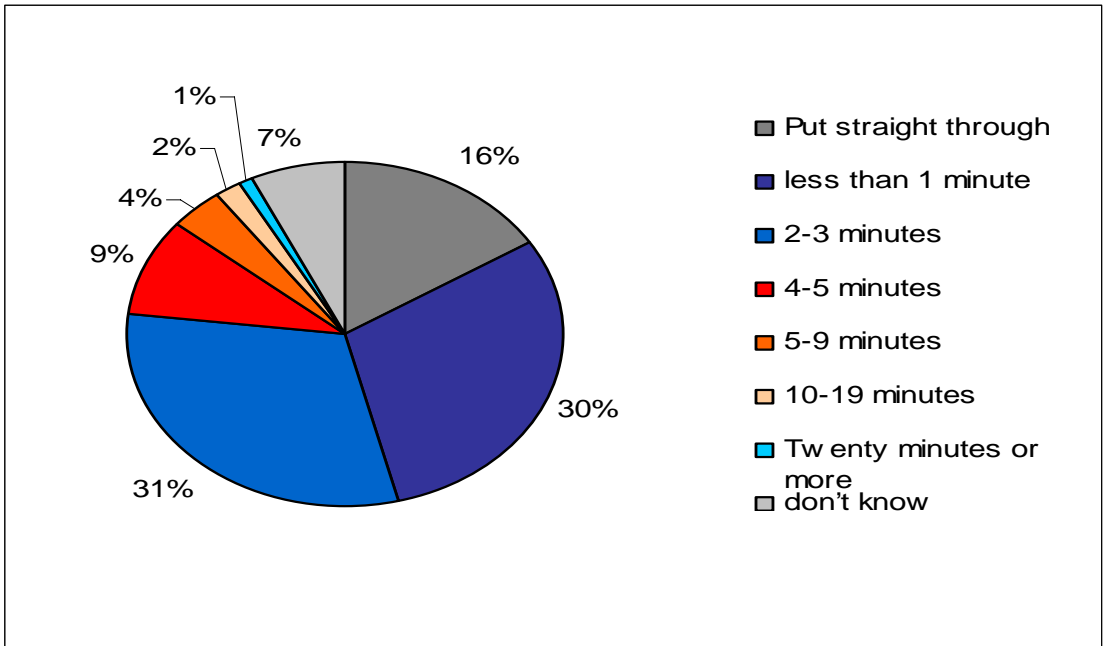


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3.3 Call waiting times

Customers were asked how many minutes they had to wait before being put through to a helpline adviser.

Chart 6: Reported number of minutes customers waited before speaking to an adviser



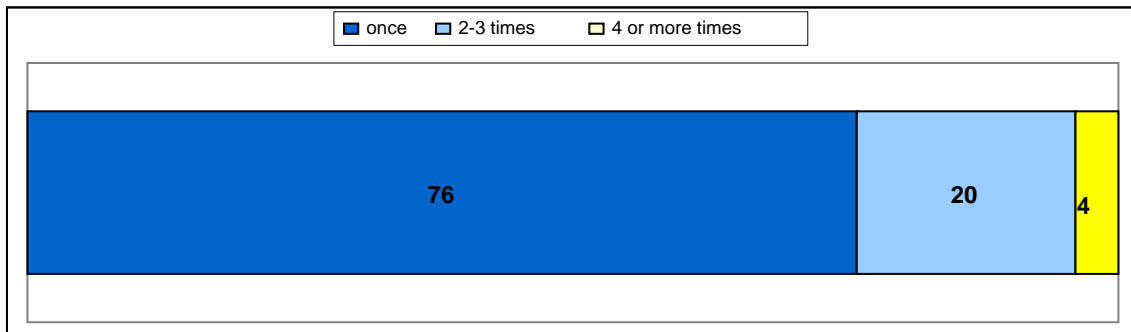
Nearly four-fifths reported they had to wait for three minutes or under. Of the remainder 9% said they waited four to five minutes, 4% said they waited five to nine minutes, 2% said they waited ten to twenty minutes and 1% waited for over twenty minutes. There was a fairly high response rate for "don't know" with 7% of respondents unable to specify how long they waited.

4 First contact resolution

4.1 Number of times the customer had to speak to an adviser about the issue

Customers were asked how many times they had spoken to an adviser about the particular query they were phoning the helpline about when they agreed to take part in the survey. Just over three quarters (76%) of respondents stated they called once about their query while one fifth (20%) stated they had to call two to three times. A small minority (4%) of customers had to call four or more times.

Chart 7: The number of times a customer spoke to an adviser about a query



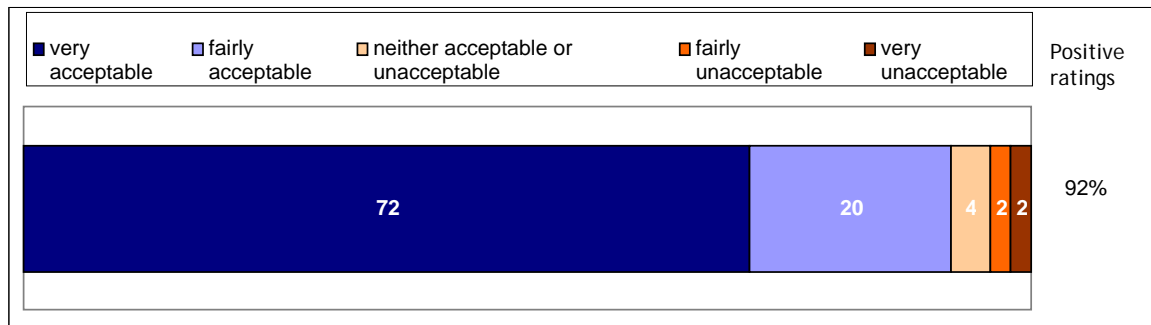
4.2 Whether the query was fully resolved

Customers were asked if their query had been fully resolved. A large majority (85%) considered their query to be fully resolved, while 15% reported that it was not resolved.

4.3 Acceptability of the number of times customers spoke to an adviser about the issue

Customers were asked how acceptable they found the number of times they had to call the helpline about their particular query. A total of 72% of customers reported that the number of times they had to call was very acceptable and 20% stated the number of times they had to call as fairly acceptable. Only 4% of respondents provided a negative response for this question.

Chart 8: the acceptability of the number of times a customer had to speak about an issue



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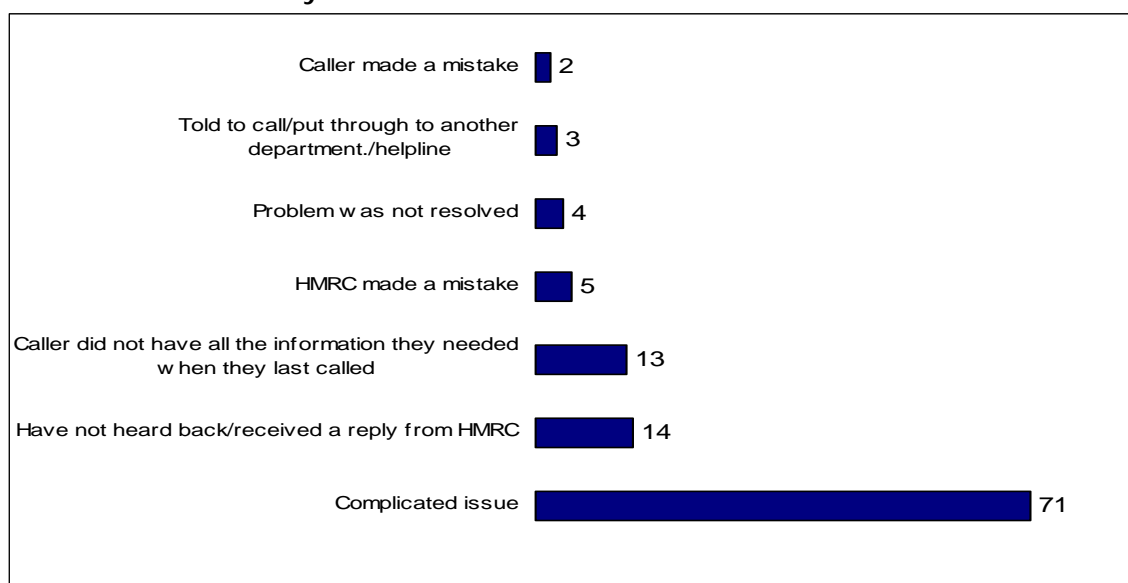
4.3.1 What is an acceptable number of times to speak to an adviser?

Customers who called a helpline once were likely to rate the acceptability of the number of times they had to call higher than those who had called more than once (79% rating very acceptable compared to 50%).

4.3.2 Reasons for needing to talk to a helpline adviser more than once about an issue

Customers who called the helpline more than once were asked to specify why this was. A total of 71% of the customers who stated they had to call more than once indicated that there were calling about a complicated issue. This was the most common reason for calling the helpline more than once. Other reasons included the caller not having the right information during the initial/earlier call and not having heard back from HMRC when the customer had expected they would.

Chart 9: Reasons why customers called in more than once

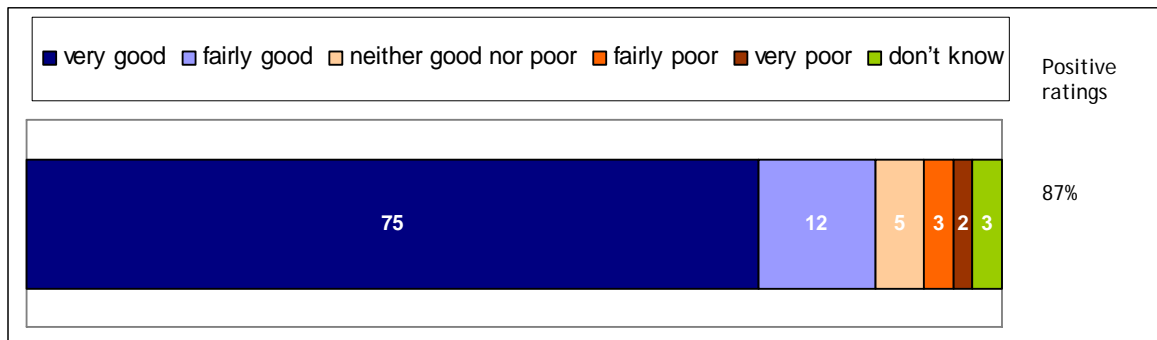


4.4 Getting things right the first time

Customers were asked for their view about how good or poor the helpline was at getting things right the first time.

The results were very positive with 87% of respondents stating the helplines were very good or fairly good at getting things right the first time. Only a small minority (5%) reported that the helpline they had called was either very poor or fairly poor.

Chart 10: Getting things right first time



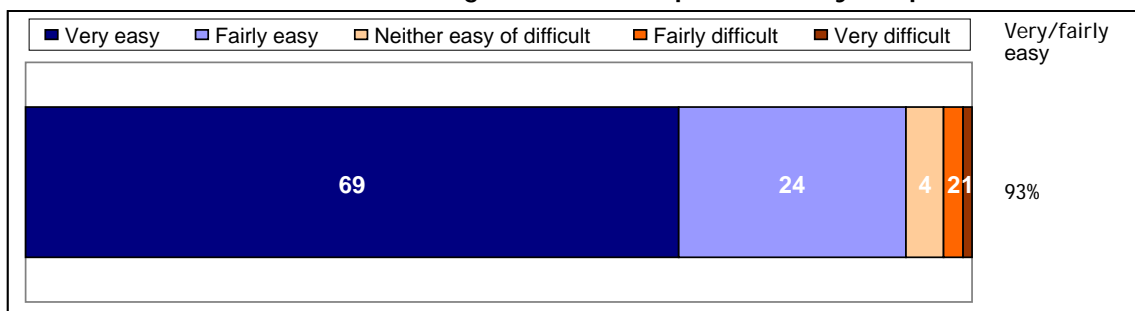
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5 Helpline Advisers

5.1 Understanding the information provided by the helpline adviser

Customers were asked for their view about how easy or difficult they found it to understand the information provided by helpline advisers. The results were very positive, with 93% of respondents stating they found it very easy or fairly easy to understand the information provided.

Chart 11: Ease of understanding information provided by helpline adviser

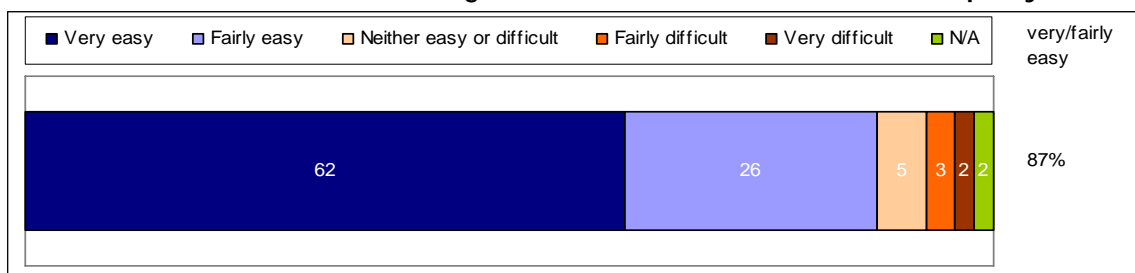


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5.2 Understanding what to do next to resolve the query

Customers were asked how easy or difficult it was to understand what they had to do next to resolve their query. A total of 88% of customers stated they found it easy to know what to do next to resolve the query, with 62% stating it was very easy.

Chart 12: Ease of understanding what to do next to resolve the query

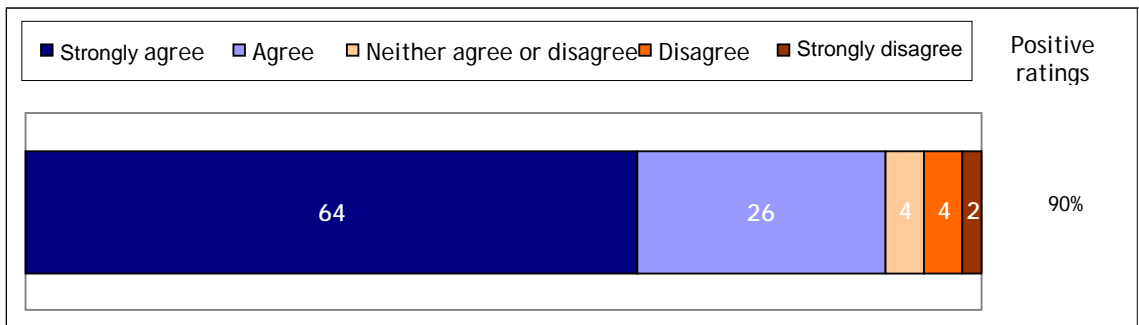


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5.3 Whether the helpline adviser had the right level of expertise to deal with the query

Customers were asked whether they felt the helpline adviser they spoke to had the right level of expertise to handle their query. The majority 90% of customers reported that they considered the adviser to have the right level of expertise: 64% strongly agreed and 26% agreed on this point. A small minority (6%) of customers thought the adviser they spoke to did not have the right level of expertise.

Chart 13: The adviser had the right level of expertise

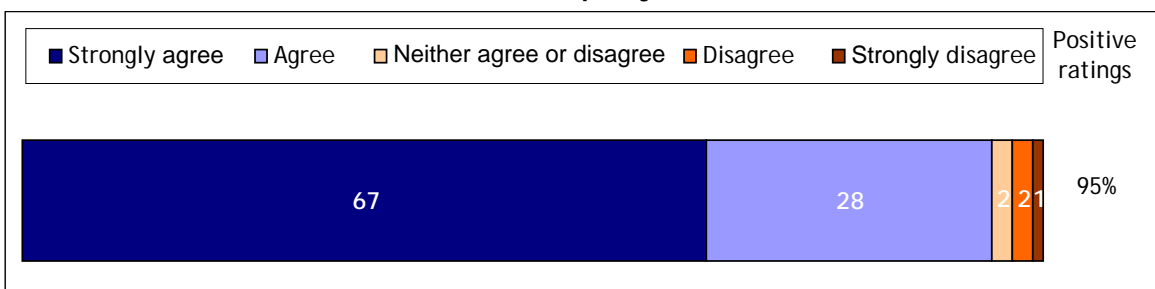


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5.4 How far do you agree the helpline adviser understood your query

Customers were asked how far they agreed or disagreed that the helpline adviser had understood their query. A large majority (95%) felt that the adviser had understood their query.

Chart 14: The adviser understood the query



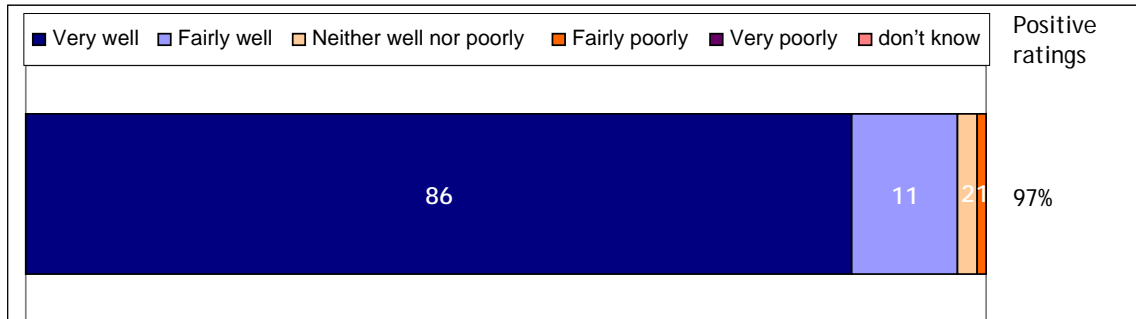
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5.5 How well the adviser treated the customer

Customers were asked to rate how well or poorly the helpline adviser treated them. Overall, 86% of customers stated they thought they were very well

treated by the helpline adviser and 11% that they were fairly well treated, adding up to a total positive score of 97%.

Chart 15: How well the adviser treated the customer



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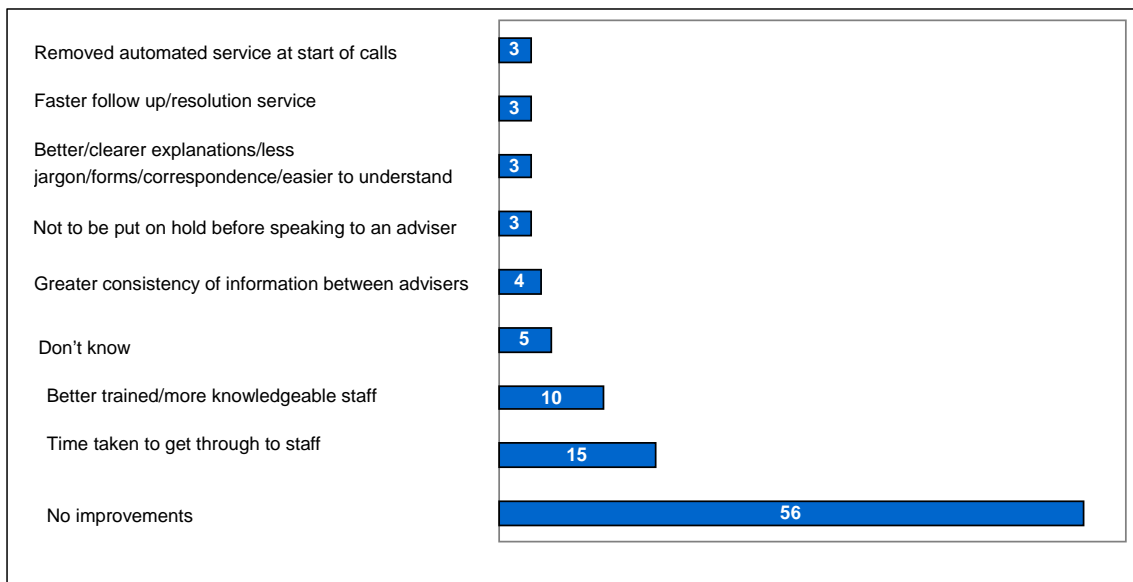
6 Improvements

6.1 How the service received could be improved

Customers were asked to provide suggestions, in their own words, of what they felt would improve the helpline service. The interviewer categorised customer's replies into a multi-code list.

The most frequent nine coded categories are represented in Chart 16 below. More than half of customers said that no improvements were needed (56%). The next most reported answers were to improve 'the time taken to get through to staff' (15%) and better trained/more knowledgeable staff (10%).

Chart 16: Improvements suggested by customers



The most frequent area suggested for improvement was the time taken to get through to staff. The Key Driver Analysis found that ease of getting in touch with the helpline was a medium driver of overall experience and a secondary area for improvement.

The second most frequent area for improvement was better trained/more knowledgeable staff. The Key Driver Analysis found that the factor with the highest relative importance on overall experience was getting things right first time. How well or poorly the adviser treated you was also an area of relatively high importance.

Although the Key Driver Analysis and the survey responses to the question on improvements show some similarities it is important to note that the two analyses measure slightly different aspects of customer experience. The Key Driver Analysis examines the relationships between certain survey responses while the improvement question asked for a top of mind response on what might improve the overall customer service.

7 Summary of results by individual helpline

This report has focused on results at Specialist Personal Tax level but analysis was also undertaken at individual helpline level. When comparing results from individual helplines it is important to keep in mind the variability in sample sizes and call volumes between the helplines. In addition there was some variability in the implementation of the sampling approach with some customers asked whether they would complete the survey at the end of the call rather than the beginning. This was the first time Specialist Personal Tax Helplines had been included in such a survey so some variability is probably to be expected. A lessons learned exercise has been completed around this point to inform any future work.

Although still favourable the results are for the Pensions helpline are lower than the other helplines, particularly in two areas; getting it right the first time and the adviser having the right level of expertise. Pensions' customers also seem to have higher expectations around first call resolution than other helpline customers. Pensions too, have the lowest percentage of customers with their query resolved at the time when they were interviewed for the survey. What the survey can not ascertain is whether the calls remain unresolved because of staff expertise not being at an appropriate level or whether the queries are so complicated that they are unlikely to be resolved the first time.

Another smaller trend indicated Trusts helpline received better results for most of the questions about customer advisers. The results also were generally more favourable for the two helplines Trusts and IHT and Probate.

8 Conclusion

The results from the Specialist Personal Tax Helpline Survey 2012-13 are very positive with 92% rating their experience good or very good and indicate in particular that customers rate helpline staff highly. 97% of customers stated they were treated well, 95% felt their queries were understood, and advisers were good at passing on information.

Getting it right the first time was identified as the key driver with the highest relative importance on overall ratings of experience. Further analysis showed that the main reason given by the 13% of customers who rated the Helplines as not getting it right the first time was their query was complicated.

In the context of the very positive results some customers identified aspects for improvement. Having the right level of expertise was highlighted. This was also reflected within the Key Driver Analysis.

Whilst 87% of callers felt getting touch was easy or fairly easy a minority of customers also identified Getting in touch as another area this small minority would like to see improved.

The survey has provided a valuable view of the Helpline service from the customer perspective, giving assurance on service levels but also highlighting areas where the high level of customer experience could be improved even further. Work has already begun to use this research to continuously improve service.