

# Pension, Disability and Carers Service customer survey: Annual Report from 2010/11

By Nick Howat, Oliver Norden and Erica Garnett

## 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) and is responsible for delivering a range of age- and disability-related benefits. Following the formation of PDCS, a customer survey was developed to monitor satisfaction with the service and to ensure that the customer voice could be heard when it comes to operational and policy planning. This report gives an overview of the findings from the customer survey in 2010/11.

The survey was designed to include only 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 two sweeps between September 2010 and April 2011.

## Overall performance

One of the key performance measures in the survey was overall satisfaction with the service and in 2010/11 91 per cent of customers were satisfied with PDCS as a whole. Overall satisfaction was higher for TPS customers than for DCS customers (94 per cent compared with 86 per cent).

When taken as a net score, dissatisfaction with PDCS stands at eight per cent which is an increase from the equivalent score in 2009/10 of six per cent. This has largely been driven by the DCS where dissatisfaction has risen from ten per cent in 2009/10 to 12 per cent in 2010/11. The TPS score has remained constant.

While overall satisfaction is an important performance metric, other items can also be used as measures to evaluate the service as a whole. Customers were asked how much improvement the service needed to make. A no improvement response can be a good measure of differentiating high performance; as in 2009/10, 53 per cent of TPS customers and 42 per cent of DCS customers said the services needed no improvements at all.

In addition to this, it was possible to look at customers' expectations alongside their satisfaction with the service. This again helps to differentiate performance at the high end; 29 per cent of TPS customers and 23 per cent of DCS customers were 'delighted'. These scores are in line with 2009/10, however, at the PDCS level there has been a fall in the proportion of customers saying that the service they received was much better than expected (a fall from 33 per cent in 2009/10 to 30 per cent in 2010/11). However, this fall has not been matched by a significant increase in customers saying that the service has been worse than expected. Instead more customers are saying that the service is meeting expectations.

The Department for Work and Pensions 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 Department tracks its performance. Scores were highest for the 'right treatment' driver at 84 per cent. 'Right result' scored 81 per cent, with 'on time' and 'easy access' scoring lower at 74 per cent and 70 per cent respectively.

These scores are broadly in line with 2009/10, the only statistically significant difference is a drop for 'easy access' (from 74 per cent to 70 per cent). This difference is led mainly by a difference in responses to the component variables for DCS customers (see Section 2.4 of the main report).

When customers were asked to say what they felt was the best thing about the service, staff were identified as the number one area for both services by some margin. The proportion of DCS customers mentioning this has increased from 41 per cent to 44 per cent since the 2009/10 survey. For TPS the proportion mentioning staff as the best area remains stationary at 37 per cent.

## 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.

Whilst claiming the State Pension remains the most common enquiry type for TPS customers (31 per cent), there has been a significant increase in the number of queries compared with the 2009/10 survey (18 per cent in 2009/10 to 30 per cent in 2010/11). Verbatim responses indicate that this increase seems to have been driven by customers responding to an initial communication from TPS. Other reasons for contacting TPS were claiming Pension Credit (PC) (15 per cent) and a notification of change of circumstances (18 per cent).

The profile of enquiry types remained similar for DCS across the two years, with 37 per cent claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA), 18 per cent claiming Attendance Allowance (AA), 11 per cent Carers Allowance (CA), 15 per cent reporting a change of circumstances and 14 per cent with general queries.

Customers were asked what contact channels they had used as part of their enquiry and telephone was the most common for both TPS (77 per cent) and DCS customers (71 per cent). For TPS this was a decrease from 83 per cent in 2009/10 and for DCS an increase from 63 per cent in 2009/10.

DCS customers were, however, still much more 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. Further detailed questions

were asked about their experiences with these channels over the course of 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, although the average number of telephone contacts decreased from 2.4 to 2.1 calls for TPS customers, while remaining constant at 2.3 calls 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.

New in 2010/11 customers were asked how long they waited for the phone to be answered. Nine per cent of TPS customers and 15 per cent of DCS customers reported that it took over five minutes for their call to be answered.

Three-quarters of PDCS customers reported that the first person they spoke to over the telephone was able to answer their query. There has been an increase in the proportion of TPS customers who were transferred to someone else when the first person they spoke to was unable to answer their query (58 per cent in 2009/10 compared with 70 per cent in 2010/11). 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 the information.

## Written communication

The average number of contacts for customers who had written to the service was lower than for telephone contacts at 1.6 for DCS customers and 1.9 for TPS customers, but was unchanged from 2009/10.

The majority of customers who wrote to PDCS were expecting a reply of some kind (83 per cent of TPS and 90 per cent DCS), and while nine in ten DCS customers then received one (92 per cent), only three-quarters of TPS customers did (74 per cent). When customers received a reply, most found them easy to understand (93 per cent of TPS and 90 per cent of DCS).

The proportion of PDCS customers completing a form as part of their enquiry has decreased between the 2009/10 and 2010/11 surveys (from 57 per cent in 2009/10 to 49 per cent in 2010/11 for TPS customers, and a smaller decrease of 74 per cent to 71 per cent for DCS customers).

Over half of DCS customers (54 per cent) and one-third (32 per cent) of TPS customers had received help when completing a form as part of their most recent enquiry. However, the proportion of TPS customers reporting that they had not required any help increased from 51 per cent in 2009/10 to 59 per cent in 2010/11. Related to this, the proportion reporting that they had received help from TPS directly decreased from 60 per cent to 48 per cent, while those getting help from family and friends increased from 25 per cent to 33 per cent.

## Online and home visits

Twelve per cent of TPS customers and 17 per cent of DCS customers reported that they had searched online for information as part of their most recent enquiry, while three per cent of TPS customers and six per cent of DCS customers had attempted an online transaction.

Customers who searched online for information were asked whether they found the information they were looking for. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of PDCS customers reported that they found all the information they were looking for, while eight per cent of TPS and five per cent of DCS customers reported that they could not find any of the information they were looking for.

For both TPS and DCS customers the proportion of customers who reported they had access to the internet at home has increased from 2009/10 to 2010/11 (from 63 per cent to 67 per cent for TPS and 62 per cent to 66 per cent for DCS). Over the same period of time all household access has increased by a similar amount (73 per cent to 77 per cent).

Eight per cent of TPS customers and 16 per cent of DCS customers had received a home visit as part of their most recent enquiry. Two-fifths (40 per cent) of TPS customers and almost half (48 per cent) of DCS

customers who were visited at home said they were asked whether they had any other needs. Fifty-three per cent of these DCS customers and 30 per cent of these TPS customers actually received help.

## 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. However, DCS customers were less likely to be satisfied with the time taken for their enquiry to be concluded in 2010/11 than in 2009/10 (77 per cent compared with 82 per cent). This seems to be particularly notable for DLA customers, where satisfaction with the length of their most recent enquiry has fallen ten percentage points from 75 per cent to 65 per cent.

As in 2009/10, 90 per cent of those who received a decision on their enquiry felt that it was clearly explained to them.

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. The proportion of DCS customers who found the enquiry complicated has increased from 33 per cent in 2009/10 to 37 per cent in 2010/11, while for TPS this has remained stable at 18 per cent. In fact for DCS the proportion of 'relieved' customers (those who found the enquiry less complicated than expected) has fallen from 14 per cent to nine per cent, while the proportion 'resigned to complexity' increased from 19 per cent to 23 per cent.

Only 37 per cent of DCS customers had their problems resolved by the time of interview in 2010/11 compared with 50 per cent in 2009/10.

## 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 performed poorly lead to dissatisfaction.

There were five must-be factors for TPS: ease of getting in contact; ease of completing forms; staff providing correct information; helpful staff; and TPS doing what it said it would.

For DCS the 'must-be' factors included not being provided with correct information, the Service not doing what it said it would, staff not being respectful or polite, the timings and quantities of contact, the time it took for DCS to reply to letters and the total number of contacts required.

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

The performance factors for TPS were whether customers encountered any problems in the last six months, the length of enquiry process, how complicated the enquiry process was, whether they were given progress updates and how well any decision was explained.

Many of the performance factors for DCS were similar to those factors identified for TPS. Whether the customer had any problems, the complexity of the enquiry, the length of the enquiry, and how well

any decisions were explained were all performance factors affecting both agencies. For DCS there were two further staff-related performance factors: whether the staff were sympathetic to their needs; and whether they were helpful.

The 'attractive' factors are those aspects that will increase satisfaction but their absence does not lead directly to dissatisfaction.

The attractive factors for TPS were: the length of time it took for the telephone to be answered; the length of time it took for the enquiry to be resolved; whether staff were sympathetic to their needs; gave clear timings; were able to answer their query at the first call; and requiring less contacts overall than expected.

There was a number of different attractive factors for DCS. There were certain telephone-specific factors such as whether the amount of time for telephone calls to be answered was reasonable, whether the first person they spoke to could answer their questions and whether they felt the staff listened to what they had to say. Further attractive factors were whether they were given progress updates and clear timings and how easy forms were to complete.

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Carol Beattie, Central Analysis Division, Department for Work and Pensions, Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ. Email: [Carol.Beattie1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Carol.Beattie1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).