

Social justice communications: Feedback from advisers and intermediaries

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Executive summary

DWP Communications ran an online survey between 14 and 22 February 2012 on its corporate website (www.dwp.gov.uk), to obtain the views of advisers and intermediaries on their understanding of the concept of social justice, ahead of the publication of the Government's social justice strategy on 13 March 2012. This report summarises feedback from 747 respondents.

The survey was not a formal consultation. It aimed to provide information that would help DWP launch the social justice strategy, and develop longer term engagement activity to reflect audience needs and understanding of social justice.

Some respondents acknowledged a need for the Government to consider how to allocate finite resources, and how best to help people into work. Others were uncertain what the Government was doing, or reserved judgement until they could see evidence of the effectiveness of the Government's policies. Some were critical of the Government's approach, pointing to, for example, the need for consistent messaging on social justice. Others wanted to see further evidence that what the Government is doing fitted with their understanding of social justice.

This research was conducted before the launch of the social justice strategy on 13 March 2012. It highlighted a need for Government to clearly articulate its objectives in this area, and provide evidence of how its strategy can make a positive difference.

Specific recommendations include:

1. Continue to update advisers and intermediaries about social justice by regularly adding information to the advisers and intermediaries section of the DWP website, and by using other DWP communications channels such as the Touchbase ezine and Stakeholder bulletin.
2. Design and promote other opportunities to engage in dialogue with advisers and intermediaries on social justice.

The research has already shaped communications activity in the following areas:

1. A new specific social justice area has been developed on the DWP website. It contains links to the *Social Justice: Transforming Lives* publication, alongside real life video case studies of individuals and families who have been helped to sustain improvements to their lives. Additional case studies will be added on a regular basis.
2. DWP stakeholder channels such as DWP Touchbase and the DWP bulletin, have included articles that highlight the *Social Justice: Transforming Lives* publication, and encourage the audience to view the case studies on the corporate site.

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3. Events and speaking opportunities are being developed for Ministers, officials and stakeholders to help communicate the social justice approach, as outlined in *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*.
4. Staff across Whitehall are an important audience in helping to deliver the fundamental principles of prevention and second chances, as outlined in *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*. DWP has already started to engage other Government Departments to ensure a consistent communications approach.

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1 Research objectives and design

1.1 Research objectives

DWP is developing communications activity relating to social justice, with the following communications objective:

- Develop and consolidate the social justice community – building stakeholder relationships to embed the Government’s vision of social justice and its key principles into “business as usual”.

In preparation for this work, DWP sought the views of advisers and intermediaries on the Government’s work to date on social justice. Survey questions were designed to assess respondents’ current perceptions of Government activity in this area prior to the launch of the social justice strategy.

DWP intended to use the research’s findings to plan initial and longer-term engagement activity to support the social justice strategy.

The survey was not a formal consultation, and the responses are not statistically representative of the entire adviser and intermediary community. It does, however, provide a snapshot of the opinions of advisers and intermediaries before the strategy’s launch

1.2 Research design

The survey was run on the Advisers and Intermediaries section of the DWP corporate website (www.dwp.gov.uk). It comprised a mixture of multiple choice and free text answers.

2 Research findings

2.1 Number of responses

Fieldwork took place between 14 and 22 February 2012. Not all respondents answered every question, and the number of respondents to each question fluctuated between 576 and 747.

2.2 Occupational sector of respondents

Almost half of respondents work in the charity/voluntary/community sector. The second largest group was 'education', which was not listed as an option in the survey, but was notified via free text. Indeed, interest from the education sector was significant, and should be noted. As the survey was located on the advisers and intermediaries section of the DWP corporate website, their interest may be relevant to DWP staff working with that sector.

When analysed, the responses were placed into one or more of the following categories:

1. Charity/voluntary/community (49 per cent)
2. Education (15 per cent)
3. Local Authority (11 per cent)
4. Commercial (ten per cent)
5. Central Government (six per cent).

2.3 Location of respondents

Respondents came from all regions of the UK:

- East Midlands (seven per cent)
- East of England (eight per cent)
- Greater London (16 per cent)
- North-East England (six per cent)
- North-West England (12 per cent)
- South-East England (excluding Greater London) (12 per cent)
- South-West England (eight per cent)

- West Midlands (seven per cent)
- Yorkshire and the Humber (12 per cent)
- Scotland (nine per cent)
- Wales (three per cent)
- Northern Ireland (one per cent)

2.4 General awareness of the term “social justice”

Almost all of the respondents had heard of the term “social justice”.

2.5 What does social justice mean to you?

The question “What does social justice mean to you?” generated a lot of interest. Some replies were short and to the point, while others were very detailed.

Prominent themes, along with illustrative quotes, follow:

i. Creating a fairer, more equal society

The words “fair”, “fairness”, “equal”, “equality”, and “society” were regularly used. Explanations were often based on philosophical or political principles relating to the distribution of wealth.

“A means of achieving equality through the redistribution of assets and opportunities.”

“Fairness and equality of chances, choices, and outcomes for people.”

“It represents an overarching concept of social fairness and equality, in particular tackling poverty and inequality.”

“Reducing the wealth and income gap between rich and poor. Moving to a more equal distribution of income between all members of our society, including benefit claimants and the unemployed. Reducing income tax for low earners and increasing it for high and middle earners.”

ii. Looking after people

Many respondents stressed the importance of society supporting people who need help as a result of disability or unemployment, and of providing opportunities to improve these people’s lives.

“Equality of opportunity. Protection for the vulnerable in society, access to health, education and housing for all irrespective of background.”

“Ensuring that 'hard to reach' and vulnerable people have equal access and equal opportunity to improve their position.”

“Treating people fairly, providing a safety net for those who need it, applying the law equally to rich and poor.”

iii. Rights and responsibilities

The need to balance individuals' rights with their responsibilities to wider society featured in several responses.

“All recognising their rights and responsibilities – where necessary getting help to understand these and how to work together to create social harmony that benefits all.”

“Treating all citizens fairly and ensuring that they are aware of and can exercise their rights and responsibilities.”

“Suitable punishments fitting [the] crime, and offenders actually being rehabilitated.”

iv. Don't know

A small number of respondents were unsure what the term “social justice” meant.

2.6 What does social justice mean to the Government?

The question “What do you think social justice means to the Government?” also generated considerable interest.

Prominent themes were as follows:

i. Some respondents felt that the Government is attempting to achieve a balance between helping those genuinely in need, while also not penalising people's hard work. Some hoped that the Government's work on social justice would coincide with their own definition of what the term means. A further group were hopeful, but reserved judgement until more evidence was available.

“Fairness in the application of support for the disadvantaged in society.”

“I hope it means the same [to the Government as it does to me].”

“[There is] more emphasis on individual/ family responsibility, and a smaller safety net. There are probably different meanings within the Government.”

ii. Other respondents questioned whether or not the Government really understands the concept of social justice, suggesting that a narrow definition of it was currently being used. Some said it means different things to different parts of Government, leading to a confused and contradictory approach.

“It is not clear – the idea of the ‘Big Society’ should help bring people together to address injustice and improve quality of life, but this has been hampered by lack of resources and strategy.”

“I feel there's a disparity between [what the Government claims it means] and how they act upon it.”

iii. A small number of respondents were unsure of the Government's definition of social justice, or how this translated to policy.

“I think they, [the Government], are in theory committed to equality of opportunity and income, (and property) redistribution, but I'm not sure whether this will really be worked out in practice.”

2.7 What is the Government doing for individuals and families with multiple disadvantages?

The question “What do you believe the government is doing about individuals and families with multiple disadvantages?” generated further detailed responses.

Prominent themes in responses to this question were as follows:

i. There was acknowledgement of the economic problems faced by the Government, and the resulting need to think carefully about how benefits are paid, as well as how to help people into work.

“Trying to prioritise where funding is directed to as there is not enough money available to meet demand.”

“Promoting more intensive, one-on-one programmes, and trying to make work pay.”

“There have been enough benefits available previously. The problem for the Government lies in correctly identifying the families who genuinely need the support.”

ii. Comments which were critical of the Government's approach were more numerous. Some cited cuts in individuals' benefits, and to funding for organisations delivering services. Others felt that the Government's approach was either too narrow, disjointed, or that they were not doing enough.

"Cutting funds to organisations experienced in dealing with these people."

"I think people's needs are often taken care of piecemeal rather than holistically – which undermines the effectiveness of interventions, and leads to a waste of resources."

"Referring them to private companies or some to Local Authorities. The whole thing is too disjointed."

iii. Other respondents wanted to see more evidence of the effect of what the Government is doing. Some requested more information.

"I believe that the Government has a strategy for the 120,000 most disadvantaged ('troubled') families, but I think it is not yet clear what this means in practice."

"I am not sure what the Government is doing."

2.8 How effective is the Government in dealing with people with multiple disadvantages?

A few respondents believed that the Government is effective in its current approach to dealing with individuals and families with multiple disadvantages. A larger group disagreed that this was the case. Some were not aware of anything that the Government is currently doing. This suggested a lack of information in this area ahead of publication of *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*.

2.9 Who is best placed to deliver services to people with multiple disadvantages?

When asked "Who do you think is best placed to deliver services to individuals and families with multiple disadvantages?" respondents' first choice was Local Authorities, closely followed by voluntary and community organisations. The survey design does not make it possible to measure any correlation (or otherwise) between respondents' own employment sector and their responses to this question.

When analysed, the responses were placed into one or more of the following categories:

1. Local Authorities (36 per cent)
2. Voluntary and community organisations (33 per cent)
3. Central Government (22 per cent)
4. Private sector companies (five per cent).

2.10 To what extent do the respondents work with other organisations to help their customers?

The answers to the question “Do you work with other organisations to deliver integrated support for your customers?” pointed to widespread collaboration within or across respondents’ sectors.

2.11 Survey respondents wanting more information

Many respondents wanted further information on social justice, suggesting a clear interest in this area, but a potential gap in information provision at the time of the survey (before publication of *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*).

3 Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

1. The objectives of this survey were met, by providing an evidence base to design engagement activity.
2. This survey provides clear evidence of the interest that advisers and intermediaries have in Social justice, and in what the Government is currently doing about it.
3. The research pointed to a clear need to consider how Government engages effectively on social justice with the adviser and intermediary community.

3.2 Recommendations

This research was conducted before the launch of the Social justice strategy on 13 March 2012. The views expressed are from a relatively small group of advisers and intermediaries, and the sampling approach means that they are not necessarily representative of the entire community. The research highlighted a need for Government to clearly articulate its objectives, and provide evidence of how its strategy can make a positive difference.

Specific recommendations include:

1. Continue to update advisers and intermediaries on social justice by regularly adding information to the advisers and intermediaries section of the DWP website, and by using other DWP communications channels such as the Touchbase ezine and Stakeholder bulletin.
2. Design and promote other opportunities to engage in dialogue with advisers and intermediaries on social justice.

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2. DWP stakeholder channels such as DWP Touchbase and the DWP bulletin, have included articles that highlight the *Social Justice: Transforming Lives* publication, and encourage the audience to view the case studies on the corporate site.
3. Events and speaking opportunities are being developed for Ministers, officials and stakeholders to help communicate the social justice approach, as outlined in *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*.

4. Staff across Whitehall are an important audience in helping to deliver the fundamental principles of prevention and second chances, as outlined in *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*. DWP has already started to engage other Government Departments to ensure a consistent communications approach.