



# DWP Claimant Service and Experience Survey 2014/15

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## Background and objectives

This report presents findings from the 2014/15 Claimant Service and Experience Survey conducted on behalf of DWP by TNS BMRB. The findings are based on 14,918 telephone interviews with people who were claiming working-age, disability, carer or pension-related benefits from DWP and had been in contact with the Department in the past three months<sup>1</sup>.

The survey is designed to monitor claimants' satisfaction with the service offered by DWP and ensure that the claimant voice is heard when it comes to operational and policy development. Its key objectives are:

- to capture the views and experiences of DWP's service delivery from claimants (or their representatives) who used the service recently;
- to detect variations in the views and experiences of claimants in receipt of different benefits;
- to use claimants' perspectives of the service to measure the Department's performance

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<sup>1</sup> The 2014/15 survey incorporated the views of claimants of: Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Universal Credit (UC), Disability and Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA), Carers Allowance (CA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), State Pension (SP), and Pension Credit (PC).

against the key elements in the Customer Charter: 'ease of access', 'getting it right', 'keeping you informed' and 'right treatment'<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike previous years, the 2014/15 survey was conducted at quarterly intervals rather than once during the year, with fieldwork taking place on the following dates:

- Quarter 1: 09/07/14 to 10/08/14
- Quarter 2: 02/10/14 to 05/11/14
- Quarter 3: 13/01/15 to 16/02/15
- Quarter 4: 13/04/15 to 10/05/15.

The report combines the data collected throughout the course of the year to present an annual view of claimants' perspectives. 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 in the three months prior to interview.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/292673/customer-charter-dwp.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/292673/customer-charter-dwp.pdf)

## **Satisfaction with DWP's service delivery**

Overall, 82 per cent of claimants who had contact with DWP in 2014/15 were satisfied with the service they received, compared to 81 per cent in 2013. This difference is not statistically significant and reflects the fact that some benefit groups have maintained the same satisfaction levels as the year before, but also masks a number of changes.

As in previous years, customers in receipt of pension-related benefits reported the highest satisfaction scores (95 per cent). The proportion of Pension Credit (PC) customers who were satisfied has risen over the last year (from 91 per cent to 95 per cent). There has been no equivalent change among State Pension (SP) customers, though satisfaction levels have risen gradually over time, with more people expressing satisfaction in 2014/15 (95 per cent) than in 2012 (93 per cent).

Satisfaction has become more widespread among claimants in receipt of disability-related benefits. Satisfaction levels for Attendance Allowance (AA) claimants have increased to 89 per cent following a sudden decline in the previous year (81 per cent, down from 88 per cent in 2012); similarly, satisfaction levels for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants have risen to 87 per cent. The proportion of satisfied DLA claimants this year is out of keeping with satisfaction levels recorded previously (81 per cent in 2012 and 80 per cent in 2013). This may partly be explained by the changing composition of this group which has occurred as existing DLA claimants with fixed awards have transferred onto Personal Independence Payments (PIP): the transfer means that disproportionate weight is currently being placed on the views of DLA claimants with indefinite awards.

The satisfaction levels of claimants in receipt of Carer's Allowance (CA) have remained stable (92 per cent).

The past year has seen satisfaction rise to 93 per cent among Income Support (IS) claimants, despite recent changes in lone parents' obligations which might be expected to colour their views of the service. The proportion of claimants on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who were satisfied with the service has not changed significantly over the same period (81 per cent in 2014/15). By contrast, satisfaction levels among claimants in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) have risen from 78 per cent in 2013 to 81 per cent in 2014/15. It should be noted that the composition of the JSA claimant population has been gradually changing as a result of the gradual roll-out of UC, and now includes fewer single claimants than it did previously. Changes in satisfaction levels may partly be linked to these changes in composition.

UC and PIP are new benefits. In 2014/15, UC claimants were more likely to be satisfied (84 per cent) than either JSA or ESA claimants (81 per cent each). Meanwhile, PIP claimants reported the lowest level of satisfaction out of all the benefit groups (68 per cent), though this was partially driven by the negative views of disallowed PIP claimants. If the answers of disallowed claimants are discounted, satisfaction among claimants awarded PIP (at 79 per cent) was broadly in line with overall levels of DWP claimant satisfaction, though markedly lower than among claimants awarded DLA (92 per cent).

## **The experiences of PIP claimants**

Experiences of the service they received during their selected transaction may help explain why a relatively lower proportion of PIP claimants expressed satisfaction with the service. It is important to note that PIP findings include disallowed as well as allowed cases, although, unless stated otherwise, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups.

**Ease of access:** Nearly seven in ten (69 per cent) of PIP claimants said they found it easy to access DWP during their transaction (compared to 75 per cent among all claimants). Over eight in ten (83 per cent) reported that the written correspondence they received contained no errors (compared to 91 per cent among all claimants) and over six out of ten (61 per cent) reported their first telephone call to DWP to be answered (compared to 70 per cent overall).

**Getting it right:** More than two thirds (68 per cent) of PIP claimants perceived that they had received an adequate explanation about their payment, with answers among claimants who were awarded PIP closer to the average for all claimants of 80 per cent. A higher proportion (83 per cent) said that they had received an adequate explanation of the decisions reached regarding their benefit, closer to the average for all claimants of 87 per cent. Fewer than one in five PIP claimants (19 per cent) perceived that they had received incorrect or contradictory information, though this was higher than the average for all claimants (12 per cent). Just over two thirds of PIP claimants (69 per cent) said that DWP did what it said it would do (compared to an average of 87 per cent). Also, nearly eight in ten (77 per cent) believed that the staff they spoke to when they called DWP provided them with the correct information and the same proportion felt that staff were knowledgeable (compared to 91 per cent and 85 per cent overall).

**Keeping you informed:** Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of PIP claimants stated that they were provided with clear timings and 49 per cent said that they were provided with progress updates during their transaction (compared to 71 per cent and 66 per cent respectively overall). They were more likely than those on other benefits to have underestimated the amount of contact that would be required for the transactions, with 33 per cent saying that their transaction entailed a greater amount of contact than they had anticipated.

**Right treatment:** Just over one in four PIP claimants reported some difficulties or problems in their dealings with DWP, compared to 12 per cent overall, although the base size of PIP claimants experiencing difficulties is too small to draw conclusions about the proportion who considered those problems to be resolved by the time of interview.

## **The experiences of UC claimants**

In many ways the experiences of UC claimants reflected those of JSA claimants:

**Ease of access:** Around three quarters of UC claimants (78 per cent) found it easy to get in contact with DWP throughout the process of their transaction. This was also true of 77 per cent of JSA claimants.

**Getting it right:** In common with JSA claimants, approximately four in five UC claimants received clear explanations about their payment calculations (80 per cent); were given clear explanations about any decisions reached with regards to their benefit (83 per cent); and reported that DWP did what it said it would do during their transaction (84 per cent). Similar proportions of UC and JSA claimants felt that staff were knowledgeable or provided them with correct information. However UC claimants were more likely than all other claimants on working-age benefits to say that they were given incorrect or contradictory information (16 per cent).

**Keeping you informed:** UC and JSA claimants reported similar experiences with regards to being kept informed. Around four fifths of UC claimants recalled being told about next steps in their transaction (81 per cent); 72 per cent were given clear timings on what DWP would do; and 71 per cent were kept up to date with the progress of their transactions. However JSA claimants were less inclined to seek progress updates (23 per cent, compared with 29 per cent of UC claimants) and fewer felt that their transactions required more contact than they

originally anticipated (14 per cent, compared to 18 per cent of UC claimants).

Right treatment: For the most part, UC, JSA and ESA claimants had similar perceptions of DWP staff's politeness, helpfulness and understanding of their personal circumstances, with around nine in ten reporting positive impressions. Problems or difficulties with DWP were reported by one in seven UC claimants (14 per cent) and a similar proportion of JSA claimants (12 per cent).

UC claimants gave more positive views of the employment services offered by DWP than claimants in receipt of JSA. They were more likely than JSA or ESA claimants to rate their local Jobcentre Plus office's job searching facilities positively (74 per cent), and more likely to be satisfied with the employment services provided by Jobcentre Plus (70 per cent). Usage levels of Universal Jobmatch were similar among UC (82 per cent) and JSA claimants (83 per cent), and similar proportions of users from the two groups applied for vacancies found through this service.

## **Transactions where there were shortcomings in service delivery**

Many of the experiences reported by claimants who appealed their eligibility for ESA suggest that the service fell short of 'getting it right' when handling the appeals process. Appeals were perceived to be lengthy, complex, and error-prone processes, involving staff who were not always equipped with the knowledge required to help claimants resolve their transaction. This transaction also let down claimants in terms of 'keeping you informed'. Claimants who appealed their eligibility for ESA were less likely than claimants who undertook other transactions to receive progress updates and more likely to feel that the process entailed unanticipated levels of contact. These findings may help explain why 43 per cent of those who undertook this transaction were satisfied with the way DWP handled it.

Transactions involving ESA were perceived as more complex than equivalent transactions involving other benefits. While over a third of those who applied for ESA found the process 'very' or 'fairly' complicated (35 per cent), this was less common among claimants making new claims for JSA (27 per cent) or IS (26 per cent). And whereas around a quarter of ESA claimants who reported a change in their circumstances described this process as complex (23 per cent), only 16 per cent of JSA claimants and 13 per cent of PC claimants who tried to do this said the same. Moreover, where claimants started an ESA claim they were somewhat less likely to feel informed during the claim process than those starting claims for JSA or IS.

On average, there was a fairly high degree of satisfaction with the process of making a new claim (83 per cent). However, out of all claimants who made a new claim, those who lodged an application for PIP were the least likely to be satisfied with the way DWP handled the process (70 per cent satisfaction).

Relatively few claimants felt satisfied with the way DWP handled reports made to them about problems with benefits (63 per cent satisfaction). Claimants who undertook this transaction were less likely to report receiving progress updates and more likely to feel that the process demanded additional contact which they had not anticipated.

## **Digital services**

Over four fifths of JSA claimants (83 per cent) and UC claimants (82 per cent) made use of Universal Jobmatch, though usage among IS and ESA claimants was lower (as might be expected given that these benefit groups have different job-searching requirements).

The SP Estimator was used by 17 per cent of SP customers; the service for requesting a State Pension statement was used by seven per cent of those in receipt of SP and extremely small numbers of customers in receipt of other

pension-related benefits; while the PC Calculator was used by nine per cent of SP customers, seven per cent of PC customers and three per cent of AA claimants.

Data on the ease of finding and using the services showed that the majority of users had no trouble in locating the webpages they needed, especially with regards to JSA Online and UC Online. Users found it easier to locate most of the benefit application digital services and Universal Jobmatch on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) than benefit calculation and estimation services. Universal Jobmatch users were the most likely to say that they experienced problems with the content or functionality of the site (35 per cent), followed by users of UC online (30 per cent). PC Calculator and SP users cited the fewest issues and therefore performed best on this indicator, with 10 per cent and nine per cent, respectively, of users stating that they had experienced problems.

CA Online and JSA Online were the services most likely to be recommended by their users (recommended by over four fifths) while the service least likely to be recommended by those who had experience in using it was UC Online (73 per cent).

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