



issa

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE
ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LA SEGURIDAD SOCIAL
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALE SICHERHEIT

Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2015

Customer satisfaction surveys: Listening to the voice of the customer

Certificate of Merit with Special Mention, ISSA Good Practice Award – Europe competition 2019

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Ireland

Summary

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (“The Department”) is the largest payment organization in Ireland. It also operates the public employment services and directly funds a wide range of employment programmes and citizen advisory services.

Since 2015, the Department has carried out customer satisfaction surveys in order to understand how its clients interact with the unemployment supports and the employment services offered through Jobseekers via its own service provision and contracted service provision. Almost 20,000 people have engaged with the customer satisfaction surveys since their initiation. The surveys provide an essential feedback mechanism and inform how the Department tailors and develops its services, while receiving early warning of emerging issues and challenges.

The Department’s innovative approach to service delivery was recently recognised with the award of “Best use of innovation in customer or employee engagement” by Confirmit in the Achievement of Customer Excellence awards, recognising the survey for its work in the development of a “Voice of the Customer” metric.

Building on its success with Jobseekers, the customer satisfaction survey will be extended to additional customer groups in 2019.

The issue or challenge

What was the issue or challenge addressed by your good practice? Please provide a short description.

The *Intreo* service was established in 2011 and became the single point of contact for payment and public employment services in Ireland. Unemployment in Ireland grew by 300 per cent during the economic crisis, peaking at 16 per cent in early 2012. This placed a huge burden on the State’s welfare and employment services and a significant transformation programme was required to redesign business processes and reorganize service delivery. Internal operational statistics showed significant improvement with the roll out of *Intreo*. However, the voice of the customers themselves was largely absent. It was therefore decided to commence a formal and structured programme of surveying customers and capturing their feedback and input to inform ongoing reforms to the service. This was particularly important as the crisis abated and the external pressure to identify and drive continuous improvement, which is necessary in any organization, diminished.

JobPath, launched in 2015, is an employment activation programme aimed primarily at supporting long term unemployed people. The *JobPath* model is an innovative approach to activation in Ireland, including the use of contracted service providers on a payment-by-results basis. The importance of understanding, monitoring, and improving or maintaining satisfaction with the service for *JobPath* participants including the maintenance of a high level of customer satisfaction is a key criterion of the services contract with the service providers. Payments to service providers being are contingent on the service scoring well in the customer satisfaction surveys.

Senior policymakers recognised the added value of developing a customer centric feedback mechanism to (i) monitor satisfaction levels with the service (ii) inform ongoing improvement programmes and (iii) help make the case for these programmes both with external stakeholders (including the political system) and internal stakeholders (including staff).

Addressing the challenge

What were the main objectives of the plan or strategy to resolve the issue or challenge? List and briefly describe the main elements of the plan or strategy, focusing especially on their innovative feature(s) and expected or intended effects.

A key action under the “Pathways to Work Strategy 2016–2020”, Ireland’s primary labour market activation framework, is to commission and publish regular customer satisfaction surveys.

The overall objective of the Jobseeker surveys is to:

- measure overall levels of customer satisfaction with the Department’s public office and *JobPath* services across the country;
- identify barriers to high customer satisfaction with:
 - service agents,
 - processes
 - locations;
- identify particular reasons for high and low levels for each of the elements above;
- use *Jobseekers’* suggestions and insights to modify and improve current services and processes, and inform future policy developments and service delivery changes;
- establish the extent to which individuals who have since secured employment feel that the *Intreo* or *JobPath* service contributed to their securing of employment.

The elevated importance placed on the participant’s feedback is an innovative approach to shaping the service delivery, policy formation, and understanding of the services currently offered in Ireland.

The surveys feature a number of innovative measures, moving beyond only statistical analysis, for example:

- interactive dashboards, allowing divisional managers to drill-down results as stratified by a number of characteristics (age, sex, duration of unemployment, as well as by regions/office locations/*JobPath* provider);
- dynamic infographics plotting the results from all survey rounds in longitudinal waves, allowing users to focus on particular years or regions and track trends over time;
- the inclusion of verbatim customer narratives in both the survey analysis and the dashboards, allowing the research to come alive and the customer experience to come to the fore. These narratives are particularly useful in identifying performance improvement opportunities.

Tailored reporting and analyses, consolidated survey reports are produced for presentation to management board and key departmental stakeholders, and publication on the Department’s website. The outcome from the surveys has been used successfully to challenge “perceived wisdom” with regard to the merits of particular policy and service initiatives and to support the case for ongoing change.

Targets to be achieved

What were the quantitative and/or qualitative targets or key performance indicators that were set for the plan or strategy? Please describe briefly.

The surveys are conducted by a leading marketing intelligence contractor on behalf of the Department. Both empirical and verbatim analysis form part of the final research outputs. High levels of customer satisfaction is a key criterion set down in the initial contract for the provision of the *JobPath* service, and the results are monitored as a governance measure over the *JobPath* programme. Satisfaction with the Department's *Intreo* service is also closely monitored. Whilst it is difficult to set numeric targets for surveys measuring customer satisfaction, results so far have exceeded initial expectations and the focus has been on maintaining this high standard. As an action point under the Pathways to Work Strategy, performance against actions is reported on a quarterly basis to Government.

Likert scales are used to measure performance in the following key areas:

- over satisfaction with the service provided, such as improved employment prospects, or opportunities to upskill;
- satisfaction with the staff of *Intreo/JobPath* providers, including their helpfulness and efficiency;
- satisfaction with the accessibility of services and locations, including the ease of use of these services;
- the extent to which *Intreo/JobPath* providers were a contributory factor in helping *Jobseekers* secure employment.

Evaluating the results

Has there been an evaluation of the good practice? Please provide data on the impact and outcomes of the good practice by comparing targets vs actual performance, before-and-after indicators, and/or other types of statistics or measurements.

Although no numeric target for levels of customer satisfaction was set, longitudinal analysis of the results show a broad maintenance of high levels of satisfaction among customers. In some instances, extremely high levels of satisfaction were reported, i.e. 4.81 out of a maximum possible score of 5 for being greeted in a friendly manner by staff.

The survey approach is evaluated on an ongoing basis. Work planning meetings are regularly convened in conjunction with the external survey contractor to evaluate the survey instruments and modality. This monitors the continued relevance, reliability, and replicability of the questionnaire and of the research.

Survey outputs are available on our website, www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Customer-Satisfaction-Survey.

The most important outcome of survey approaches such as this is their application to support good practice both at the policy and service level. Focusing first on policy, many of the reforms introduced, in particular those which require a higher level of engagement by *Jobseekers*, were

subject to resistance/criticism by stakeholder representatives based on perceived or anecdotal experience of the services and their impacts. These criticisms became the focus of a number of parliamentary committee reviews and investigations.

The outcomes from the surveys have tested these perceptions and provided a statistically rigorous basis on which to evaluate the customer experience of the service changes. This has in turn enabled the Department to withstand uninformed pressure to modify its process approach by presenting sound and robust data at parliament while at the same time informing ongoing change.

With regard to service, the ability to disaggregate the survey data using an online interactive tool has been very useful for managers – it allows them to see their own results and not just the results of the overall service. This brings the “voice of the customer” deep into our business.

Lessons learned

Based on the organization’s experience, name up to three factors which you consider as indispensable to replicate this good practice. Name up to three risks that arose/could arise in implementing this good practice. Please explain these factors and/or risks briefly.

Factors indispensable to replicating the good practice:

- Methodology – A stratified random sample as used in the customer satisfaction surveys is key to ensuring that the Department measures the true level of satisfaction with its services among the targeted cohort. The samples are stratified on a representative basis as follows:
 - under/over 25,
 - gender,
 - duration of unemployment (under or over 1 year),
 - region
 - *JobPath* provider (if applicable).

Over 12,000 people are randomly selected each year to take part in telephone and/or web-based surveys, with an average response rate of approximately 25 per cent for the telephone surveys, meaning results are within a 3–4 per cent margin of error for each cohort. The questionnaire is reviewed each year to ensure the questions continue to be fit for purpose, adequately capture satisfaction with different elements of the services, and produce results which can be analysed on a longitudinal basis.

Failure to implement a rigorous methodological approach could result in un-representative or skewed results, or missed opportunities to elicit valuable customer feedback to inform future service delivery.

- Compliance with data protection regulations – Data protection is a key priority in any research conducted by the Department and procedures are put in place to ensure best-practise guidelines are followed. In conjunction with the external survey provider, we have agreed a Data Processing Agreement, detailing:
 - safeguards for data protection,
 - procedures for data transfers, including the use of secure platforms,
 - agreements for data retention and destruction,

- procedures for incidents reports.

All customers who are randomly selected to participate receive a letter from the Department inviting them to take part in the survey. The letter outlines that participation is not mandatory, and participation or refusal to participate will have no bearing on any services or payments the customer avails of. Importantly, the letter informs the customer that they may opt out of this and all future surveys should they not wish to take part.

The contact letter also outlines:

- the basis for conducting the survey (under Article 89 of the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR)),
- how and why they were selected to take part,
- details of the external company who have been commissioned to conduct the survey,
- details of how and why their data is used,
- channels for customer queries regarding the survey.

Without these stringent measures in place, the Department risks a breach of a customer's personal data, which could bring the reputation of the Department and wider public service into disrepute.

Ensuring there are consequences arising from the results – The development and rollout of the survey approach was sponsored by top management and is used by top management to inform its assessment of organization performance. This in turn ensures that regional and local managers are engaged in the process and can be called to account for the trends in performance.

Perhaps more notable is the use of the results to calibrate payments to external contractors. By making payments to service contractors contingent on the scores their services achieved in customer satisfaction surveys (fees can be reduced by 16 per cent from the contracted rate if scores are unsatisfactory) we ensure that contractors pay due attention to providing a high level of service to clients. The results of the surveys are also used in quarterly meetings with contractors to inform discussion on service improvements.