

Jobcentre Plus customer satisfaction: ethnic minority booster survey 2005

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This report presents the findings from a pilot study to investigate the feasibility of undertaking a booster survey of ethnic minority (EM) customers to supplement the main Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS).

A number of difficulties were encountered in obtaining a representative sample of EM customers across all ethnic groups and benefit types. In the event, a total of 2,018 customers were interviewed for the booster survey and their responses were compared with those of White respondents to the CSS.

The difficulties noted above meant that it was necessary to report the results for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) separately and comparisons between different benefit recipients are not reliable.

Sampling and statistical problems also meant that many of the results could only be broken down by broad ethnic groups, namely:

- **White;**
- **Black:** Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other;
- **Asian:** Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian;
- **Other:** Mixed, Chinese, Other.

It is recognised that these groups are broad and that there may be as much variation within these groups as there is between them. For some variables, and for JSA customers only, it is

possible to analyse the results by more detailed group, although there are some doubts about the statistical reliability of comparisons at this level.

Some key variables were also broken down by age, gender and region.

Bearing in mind the need for caution in the interpretation of findings and the exploratory, pilot nature of this study, some of the main results are summarised below.

JSA customers

- **Contact with Jobcentre Plus** is more recent for EM groups than it is for White JSA customers although there is little variation in terms of the nature of contact, with personal visits being most common for all ethnic groups.
- Bangladeshi customers are more likely than average to have had **written contact** and black customers more likely to have requested a **home visit**, although the percentages in both cases are small.
- Customers across all EM groups are more likely than White people to visit Jobcentre Plus in order to search for or enquire about **vacancies** and/or to attend a discussion with an **adviser**.
- EM customers are in general less aware of the **Customers' Charter** than are White customers, with particularly low levels of awareness among Black Africans in general, young Black people and women across all EM groups.

- Black Caribbean customers and people of Mixed race are the most likely to have considered making a **complaint** about Jobcentre Plus services in the previous year, with staff attitudes being the most common cause for potential or actual complaint across all ethnic groups. Black customers are most likely to feel that there was no point making a complaint because nothing would be done about it.
- All Jobcentre Plus customers feel that a range of **aspects of service** are important to them. In the case of EM customers, particular importance (relative to White customers) is attached to the friendliness and politeness of staff, the fact that members of staff wear a badge or tell customers their name, the speed at which business is dealt with and the availability of help for people who have difficulties with English.
- When asked to rate the **performance** of Jobcentre Plus across a range of service aspects, the lowest ratings tend to be given by Black respondents, although variations by ethnic group are generally modest.
- The '**Service Quality Gap**' in relation to the above factors – calculated as the difference between 'importance' and 'performance' – are also generally higher for Black respondents, reflecting a combination of relatively high importance and relatively low perceived performance. Particularly large gaps, in relative terms, were recorded for Black customers in relation to the friendliness and politeness of staff and the ability to find out about job vacancies.
- Black and Asian customers also give generally higher importance ratings than Whites to various **aspects of offices**, such as the display of relevant information, pleasant and welcoming atmosphere and convenience of office location.
- Variations by ethnic group in performance ratings in relation to offices and consequently in the Service Quality Gap are less stark for aspects of offices than they are for aspects of service. This suggests that the '**human factor**'

is a particularly important issue in relation to improving the experience of many Jobcentre Plus customers from EM groups.

- The above observations are broadly reflected in the responses of customers to questions regarding their **overall satisfaction** with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus. The groups expressing the lowest levels of satisfaction are Black Caribbeans, Bangladeshis and people of Mixed race.
- EM customers in general are, however, more likely than Whites to feel that the Jobcentre Plus service had **improved** over the previous year. Particularly positive responses were received from Black African, Pakistani and Other Asian customers.

IS/IB customers

- IS/IB customers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely than White customers to **visit an office** rather than contact Jobcentre Plus by telephone. They are also in contact with Jobcentre Plus slightly more regularly than White customers and more likely to request a home visit.
- EM customers are less likely than their White counterparts to be aware of the **Customers' Charter**. Black customers are more likely than others to have considered making a **complaint**, although very few customers across all ethnic groups actually made a complaint.
- Differences between ethnic groups in the **importance** attached to different aspects of service are relatively small for IS/IB customers. The two issues for which some differences emerged from the survey are 'staff tell you their name and wear a badge' (high importance for Black customers) and 'you are able to find out about job vacancies' (high importance for Black and Asian customers).
- However, EM customers gave consistently lower **performance ratings** in relation to almost all aspects of service than did their White counterparts. The gap between White and EM groups is particularly stark for IB

customers and in relation to factors such as 'friendliness and politeness of staff' and 'extent to which staff protect your privacy'.

- These findings are reflected in the **Service Quality Gap** which measures the difference between expressed importance and perceived quality of service. EM groups in general perceive a bigger quality gap than do their White counterparts. For IS respondents, the pattern is very similar for aspects of offices including the office environment and its accessibility.
- **Overall satisfaction** with Jobcentre Plus services is very similar for White and Asian IS/IB customers. However, Black customers – especially those receiving IB – report lower than average levels of satisfaction.
- Customers from EM groups are more likely than White customers to have experienced an **improvement** in service from Jobcentre Plus over the previous year, with improvements in the level of staff knowledge and reductions in bureaucracy being two of the main suggestions for further improvement in future.
- The IS/IB customer sample was relatively small and subject to doubts about its robustness and reliability. Nonetheless it is clear that customers from different ethnic groups do experience the Jobcentre Plus service differently and the survey results have provided some pointers towards potential areas for development.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 1 84123 992 5. Research Report 338. April 2006).

It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

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