

Findings from the Annual Survey of MPs and their Staff

March 2022



Survey Overview

Introduction

1. Each year, IPSA conducts an Annual User Survey of MPs and Staff to help us understand how well we are meeting the needs of our customers. This is one of our key opportunities to seek feedback from MPs and staff and also allows us to gauge our performance over the year.
2. A central focus of IPSA's recent work as an organisation has been improving the service we provide. Based on feedback from MPs and their staff and recognising a need to improve, we developed a comprehensive transformation programme with a clear focus of improvement. 2021 was the first year of a three-year strategy as laid out in our Corporate Plan. The findings from the survey suggest that the initial changes introduced have fed through into higher satisfaction ratings amongst users. Whereas last year only 34.8% of users rated our services as good, this year more than half – 51.8% – do.
3. But we are certainly not yet where we want to be as an organisation. Many users, albeit a minority, do not yet rate our service as good and for MPs, the figure is just 32.3%. While progress has been made, we view the improvement in customer satisfaction as a positive first step but not more than that. Our transformation programme, which is outlined below, will continue, and as the key findings from the survey bear out, there is still much to be done and much that can be improved on.
4. It is important for us to recognise the wider social and economic background against which we deliver services to MPs' offices. They are rooted in the communities they represent and we are one of the bodies tasked with promoting trust in our Parliamentary system. As such, in both respects our responsibility is clear. It is represented by our vision to provide a seamless regulatory service that allows MPs and their offices to focus on what really matters.

Survey Details

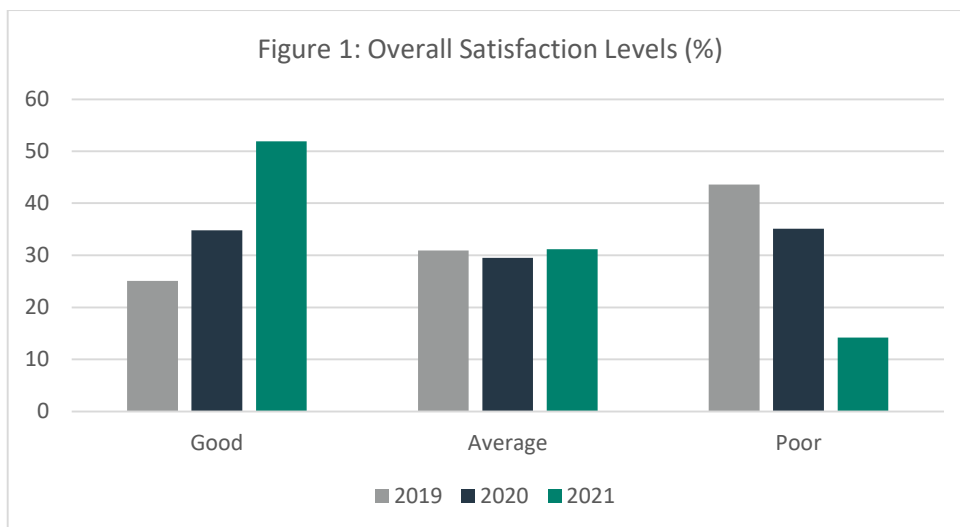
5. This year's survey ran from 25 November till 23 December 2021. We received 459 responses, with 62 responses from MPs, 171 from MPs' 'proxies' (nominated members of staff that are able to engage with IPSA on an MP's behalf) and 226 from other staff. By way of comparison, there were 302 respondents last year of whom 41 were MPs, 152 were MPs' Proxies and 109 were other staff.

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- Although the number of participants increased this year, overall, a relatively low proportion of MPs and their staff participated in the survey (10% and 9% respectively). Therefore, it is important to caveat that the findings might not be fully statistically representative of all users. Nevertheless, the findings provide an important window into the experiences and views of IPSA's users and provide valuable insights into where we can improve. Bearing this in mind, it is worth noting that we engage MPs and staff throughout the year in a range of different ways to ensure that we fully understand issues faced by customers.

Key Findings & Satisfaction Ratings

- The overall picture that the user satisfaction ratings present is one of improvement. In 2021, fully 51.9% of users rated IPSA's performance as good or very good. This is an increase on last year's figure of 34.8% of respondents rating the performance as good or very good. As noted in the introduction, despite this improvement, there are still many users that are not satisfied with our performance, including lower levels of satisfaction among MPs.



- Taking the findings as a whole, we identified the following themes emerging from the survey:
 - IPSA Online:** Customers continue to find IPSA Online difficult to use, including for important tasks such as generating reports.
 - Account Management:** Although there were improvements in satisfaction around account management, issues highlighted by respondents included dissatisfaction with email response times, advice being sometimes inconsistent, and needing more immediate access to Account Manager support.

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- **Claims process:** Overall, the claims process is viewed as long-winded and clunky. Amongst the specific findings are that respondents want clearer explanations on rejected claims and also that some MPs' staff do not claim for all allowable costs.
 - **Proxy support:** Providing appropriate proxy access, including payment cards is an important aspect of ensuring that processes are smooth for users.
 - **Payroll and HR Tools:** Users highlighted some issues with payroll and HR tools including access to payslips, annual leave tools, and the contract and job description tools.
 - **Publication approach:** Some respondents took issue with IPSA's publication approach including the amount of detail that is published, the fact that IPSA mistakes are published and the overall terminology around claims.
9. There were many other notable comments in the survey that have been shared internally and will help us to understand the needs of customers and improve our services. For instance, it was often noted that we were engaging more pro-actively with users and respondents wanted this to continue, including more opportunities for one-to-one engagement and training. We were pleased to see that positive feedback for IPSA was more widespread than in previous years, with customers recognising that IPSA has made improvements and is taking a constructive approach to working with offices.

IPSA's Transformation Programme

10. During 2021, we embarked on the first year of a three-year transformation programme. A number of important changes were implemented, many of which addressed specific issues that were raised by respondents to the previous survey. We believe the changes contributed to the overall improvement in user experience evidenced in this year's survey findings. These changes included: introducing named Account Managers; integrating MP Services with other functional areas across the organisation so that users can access support within a single team for advice from payroll, HR business partners, property services and validation; and also improved training for IPSA staff to ensure better customer service and that a 'right-first-time' advice culture is developed. We also successfully implemented an upgrade to the IPSA Online system, which will allow us to make further improvements going forward.

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11. Looking to the rest of this year and responding to feedback we have received from this survey as well as other sources, we will implement a number of changes that will help further improve customer service:

- **Improving response times to emails:** An important finding from the survey was that response times to some emails can be slow and sometimes no response is received at all. We are currently in the process of switching to a new customer relationship management system (CRM) and although this is a change to our internal processes, it will also benefit customers significantly. The main reason for this is that it will allow us to better track communication both with customers but also internally between teams allowing us to identify when and why emails are not being responded to promptly. Additionally, we will be looking at setting clearer targets internally to complete tasks to ensure that users receive timely responses.
- **IPSA Online:** We will be making use of the recent IPSA Online upgrade to introduce changes that improve user experience. These include: 'save' functionality for draft payment card transactions; removing the need for every user to clear their IPSA Online internal cache after upgrades; creating an integrated view for Office Managers through Workspaces; and improving mobile app functionality. We are also working on dynamic payroll forms to improve access to HR and Payroll support.
- **Improving advice quality & consistency:** We have been developing a quality assurance framework which is already showing us that the quality of our advice is improving. We expect customers to see further improvements as we build on how we coach our teams and ensure that a right-first-time culture of advice is developed. This includes more training opportunities for staff, including enhanced customer service training and financial fundamentals accreditation. We are also improving the information provided on our guidance website, www.ipsaonline.co.uk, to make it clearer and easier to absorb.
- **Proxy access and payment card:** We recently completed a pilot for payment cards for proxies. There was positive feedback about this and we are currently reviewing the pilot and deciding on next steps. As comments from the survey highlighted, this is an important aspect of ensuring processes such as claims run as smoothly as possible. As we simplify the Scheme and our processes there is additional scope to look at what can be delegated to proxies.

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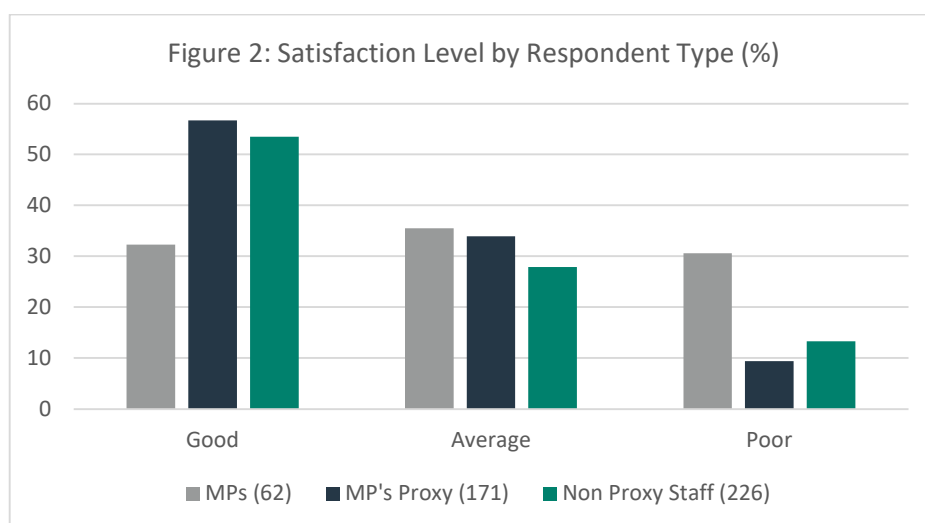
- **Scheme simplification:** We are currently working to simplify the Scheme and the processes associated with it. This involves simplifying its language and format so that it is clearer for users and supports our aim of providing better and clearer advice. Alongside this, we will be undertaking a more fundamental review of how we regulate to ensure the regulatory model serves users and also the general public. This includes active engagement with users through a Scheme Review Reference Group.
- **Approach to publication:** To ensure the safety and security of MP and staff, we have reduced the amount of publication detail available to the public and have paused further publication of claims information, so that we can seek updated advice from security experts about how to ensure sensitive information is not published going forward. A wider review of publication will be undertaken as part of our work to review IPSA's regulatory approach. In addition, we are taking a more pro-active approach in communicating the purpose of MPs' business costs to the public, including producing information videos targeted at a general audience to explain why the various budgets available to MPs are needed and legitimate. We are also no longer using the term expenses to describe MPs' business costs whether internally or externally.

Survey Findings in Detail

Satisfaction Levels

12. As already noted in the Survey Overview, 51.9% of the 459 respondents rated IPSA's overall performance as good or very good. This is a significant improvement on last year's figure of 34.8% and the even lower figure of 25.1% in 2019. It is though still below those levels reached in 2018 (67.7%).

13. Tracking the satisfaction levels across the different types of respondents, higher satisfaction levels (as measured by those rating services as good) were given by MPs' proxies and other staff (56.7% and 53.5% respectively), while ratings were lowest from MPs at 32.3%. In annual surveys, MPs have typically given IPSA lower satisfaction ratings than staff members have. This may be in part because MPs have a different set of priorities than other users. For instance, a number of comments from MP respondents related to areas such as publication and IPSA's overall regulatory approach, rather than the services which staff members focused on.



Satisfaction with individual services

14. In addition to asking about the overall satisfaction levels of users, the survey also asks how satisfied users are with the individual services that IPSA delivers. So that we can calculate a 'service gap', we also ask respondents how important each service is. We arrive at the 'service gap' by deducting the score provided for how important a service is from how satisfied respondents are with each service.

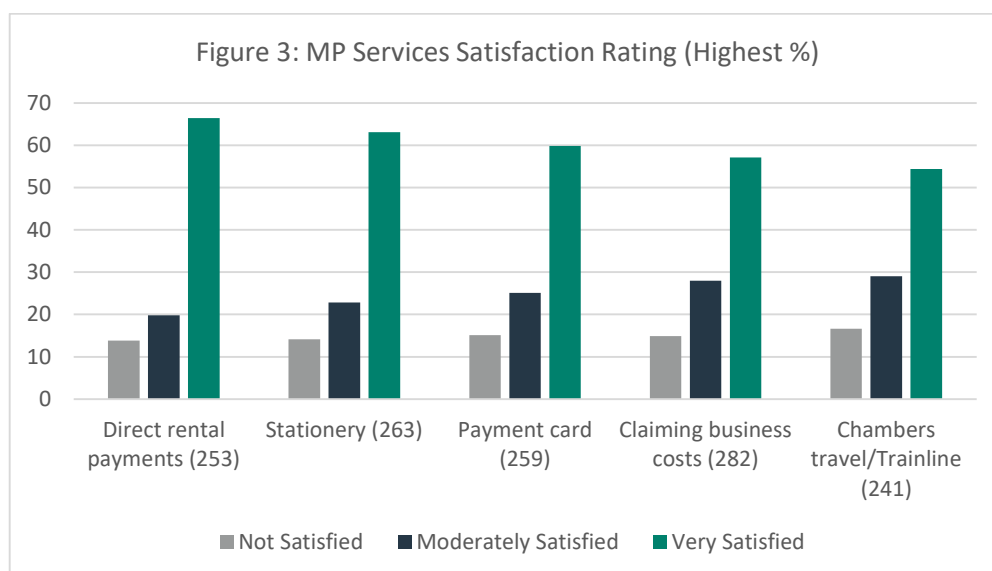
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15. As well as the quantitative picture of user satisfaction, we gather a fuller understanding of issues with services from the comments and feedback that respondents provide. This gives us a more nuanced understanding of issues with services, the steps we can take to improve them and what additional service users are looking for. These comments are discussed in more detail at the end of this report.

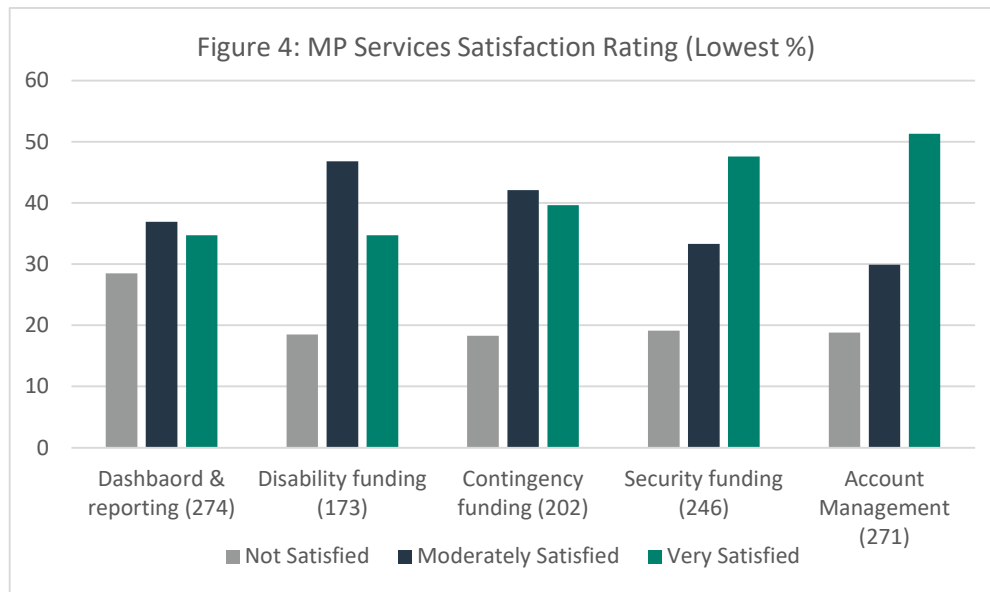
Satisfaction Ratings

16. In the survey, respondents were asked to give individual services a satisfaction rating between one and five, with one representing 'not satisfied at all' and five representing 'very satisfied'. The two graphs below (Figures 3 and 4) show those MP Services with the highest satisfaction ratings and those with the lowest satisfaction ratings. In the graphs a satisfaction score of four or five is classed as 'very satisfied', three 'moderately satisfied' and one or two 'not satisfied'.

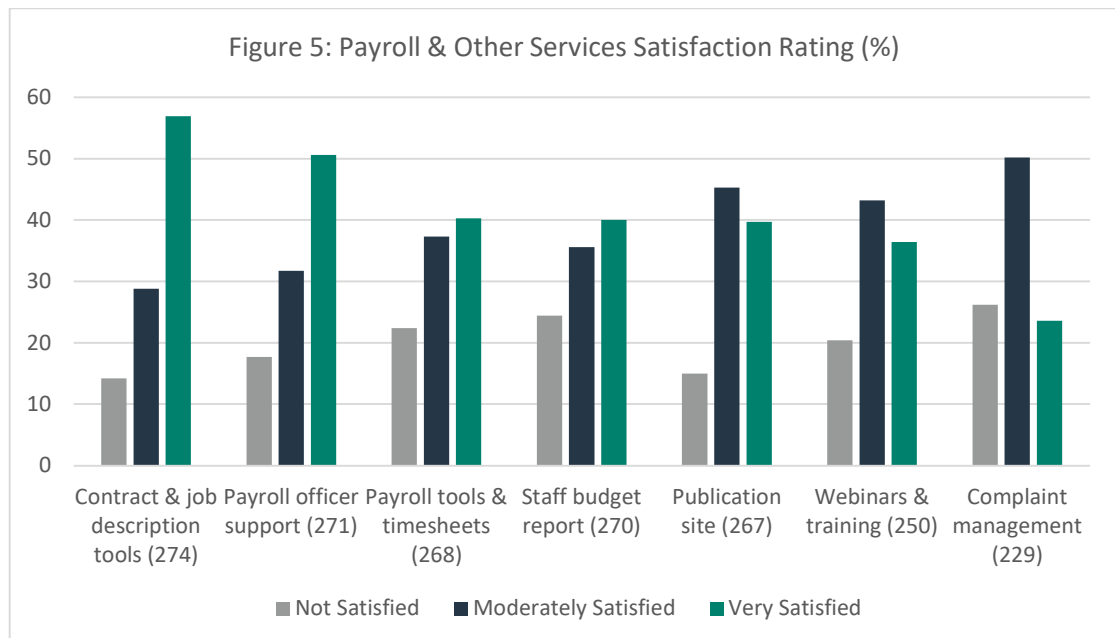
17. Many of IPSA's most important front-facing services are delivered by the MP Services team. MP Services are the initial point of contact for MPs and staff and also each office's named Account Manager sits within MP Services. Services such as direct rental payments, the payment card and claiming business costs have higher satisfaction ratings while services such as dashboard and reporting, disability funding, contingency funding, and account management have noticeably lower satisfaction ratings. The figures in brackets show the number of respondents for each question, excluding respondents who answered 'not applicable'.



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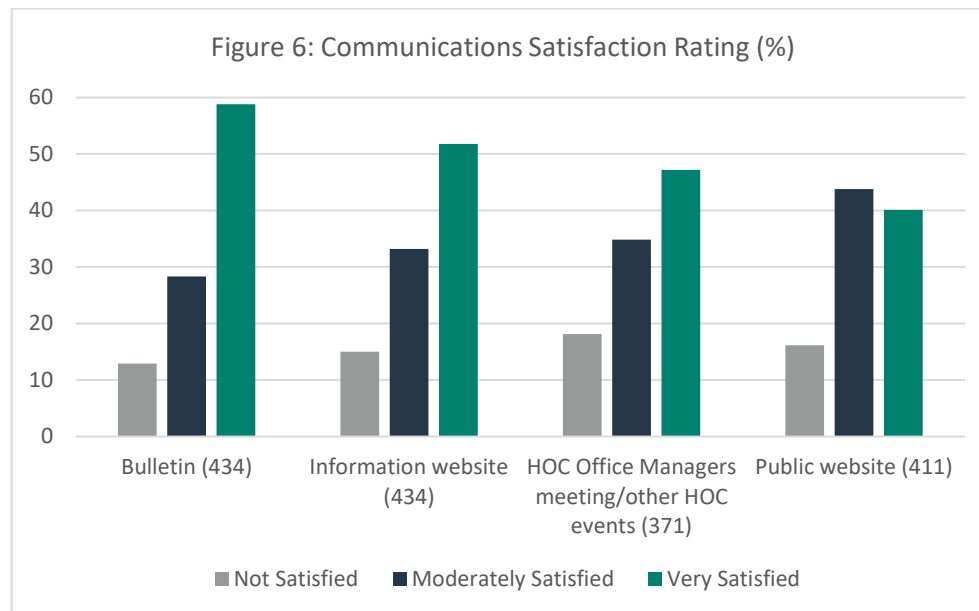
18. The same set of questions were asked for other services, including payroll and training. Amongst the payroll services asked about, similar to last year's results, the contract and job description tools had the highest levels of satisfaction, followed by Payroll Officer support. In contrast, complaint management and webinars and training have the lowest satisfaction rating.



19. IPSA is keen to provide information to users in the most effective way possible and specific questions were asked about satisfaction with how we communicate information. Highest satisfaction ratings were given to the Bulletin and information website and the lowest

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satisfaction ratings were for the public website. A new service that we asked about this year was satisfaction with IPSA's attendance at the House of Common's Office Manager meetings and similar events which we have now started regularly attending.



Service Gaps

20. To calculate the 'service gaps' for our individual services, we subtract the importance score given by a respondent from the respondent's satisfaction score. As an example, an importance score of eight and a satisfaction score of seven would result in a service gap of minus one.

21. Shown in Figure 7 is a selection of services including many of those with the largest service gaps. As well as giving the service gap for 2021, the service gap figures for 2020 and 2019 are also shown. Full details of the service gaps for all the individual services, along with importance and satisfaction ratings are provided in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

22. While the findings still show significant service gaps for some services such as the dashboard and reporting and the staff budget report, the gaps for most services have reduced notably compared with 2020 and 2019.

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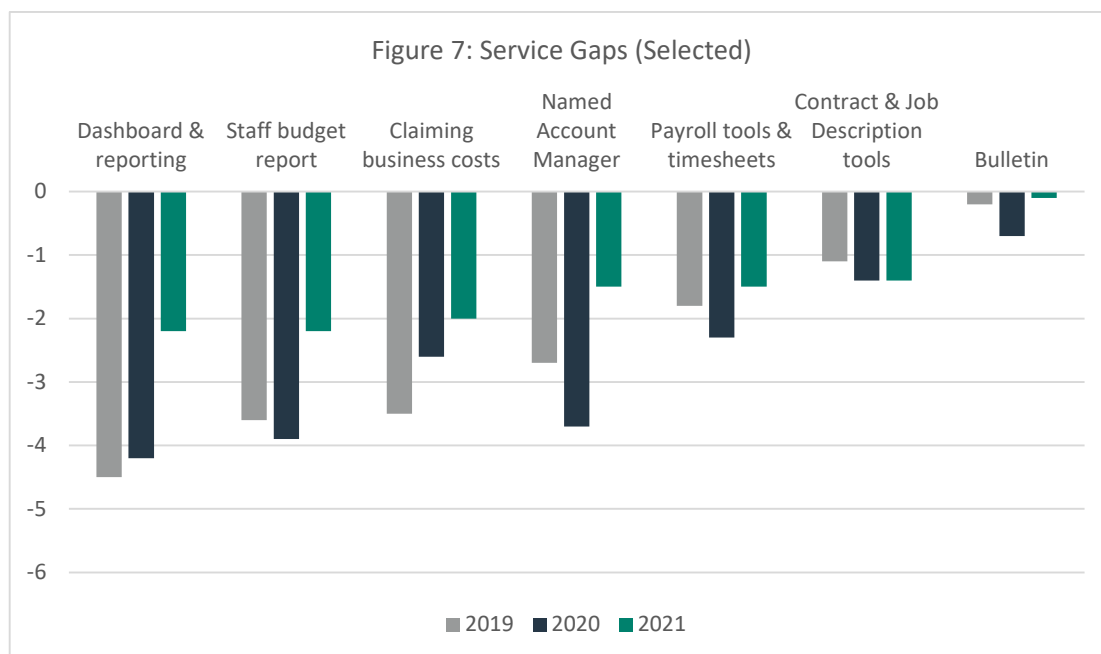


Figure 8: MP Services: Average Service Gaps*

	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap 2021	Gap 2020	Gap 2019
Dashboard and budget reporting	8.3	6.1	-2.2	-4.2	-4.5
Claiming business costs	9.1	7.1	-2.0	-2.6	-3.5
Security funding	8.5	6.8	-1.6	-1.1	-1.5
Named Account Manager	8.4	6.9	-1.5	-3.7	-2.7
IPSA payment card	8.1	7.3	-1.0	-1.5	-1.9
Contingency funding	7.3	6.6	-0.9	N/A	N/A
Direct rental payments	8.4	7.8	-0.8	-2.4	-1.9
Disability funding	6.5	6.5	-0.2	-0.9	-1.1
Stationery: Banner/Commercial/XMA	7.4	7.5	0.0	-0.4	-0.3
Travel: Chambers travel/Trainline	7.0	7.2	+0.1	-0.6	-0.7

*Because the service gap is calculated based on a matched sample where a respondent has provided both an importance and satisfaction rating, the service gap does not always equal the difference between the importance and satisfaction scores
(Where a service was not asked about in previous years, this is referred to as N/A)

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Figure 9: Payroll, Comms and Other Services: Average Service Gaps

	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap 2021	Gap 2020	Gap 2019
Staff budget report	8.6	6.5	-2.2	-3.9	-3.6
Complaint management	7.5	5.8	-1.7	-4.8	N/A
Payroll tools and timesheets	7.9	6.5	-1.5	-2.3	-1.8
Payroll Officer support	8.5	7.1	-1.4	-3.1	-3.4
Contract and job description tools	8.6	7.3	-1.4	-1.4	-1.1
Publication site for publication data	7.6	6.7	-1.0	N/A	N/A
Webinars and training	7.0	6.4	-0.7	-2.4	N/A
MPs information website (www.ipsonline.org.uk)	7.5	6.9	-0.7	-0.6	N/A
HOC joint events & Office Managers	6.7	6.8	-0.1	N/A	N/A
The Bulletin	7.2	7.2	-0.1	-0.7	-0.2
Public website (www.theipsa.org.uk)	6.0	6.6	+0.4	-1.2	-1.7

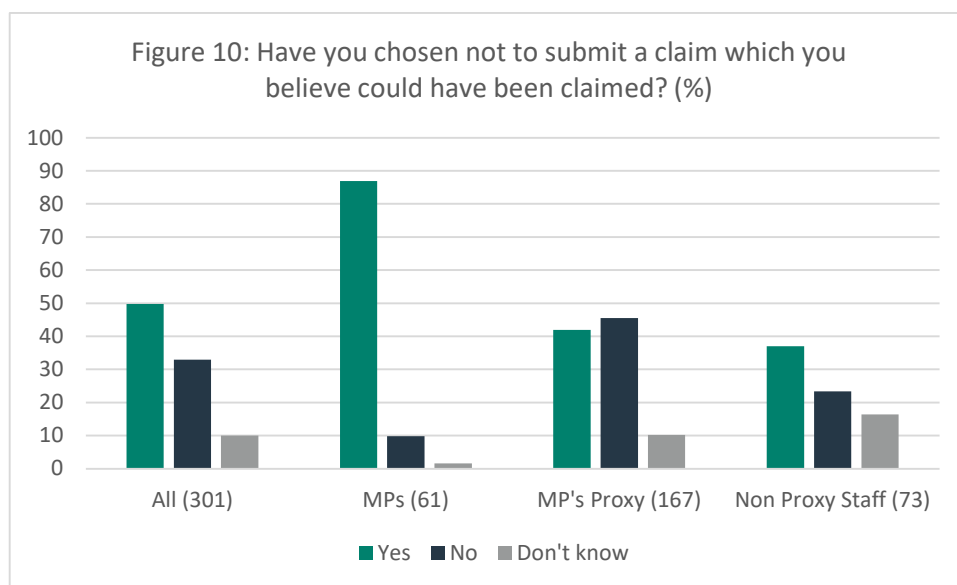
Claiming Business Costs

23. A main duty of IPSA is to regulate MPs' staffing and business costs based on the rules of what can and can't be claimed according to the Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs. In order to do this, IPSA requires MPs to submit claims, which IPSA then validates by checking the claim is allowed under the Scheme and that the required evidence has been provided.

24. When claims are submitted that do not meet the requirements of the Scheme (for example where additional evidence is required), claims are returned to the MP and/or staff member via the online system, accompanied by explanatory notes. Asked whether these notes were clear after a claim was returned, 38.2% of respondents whose claim had recently been returned stated that the notes were not clear. Although a reduction from last year, we recognise that this is a problematic area that needs to be improved upon and we are reviewing our processes and how to improve the visibility of the explanatory notes when they are returned.

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25. Respondents were also asked whether they had chosen not to claim for a business cost which they believed could have been claimed. As can be seen in Figure 10, half of respondents (49.8%) answered yes, including 86.9% of MPs. Items mentioned most commonly as not being claimed were relatively low in cost, but some MPs reported not claiming for items costing more than £1,000. Notably, MPs' staff members also indicated that they did not always claim business costs, albeit usually for small amounts.



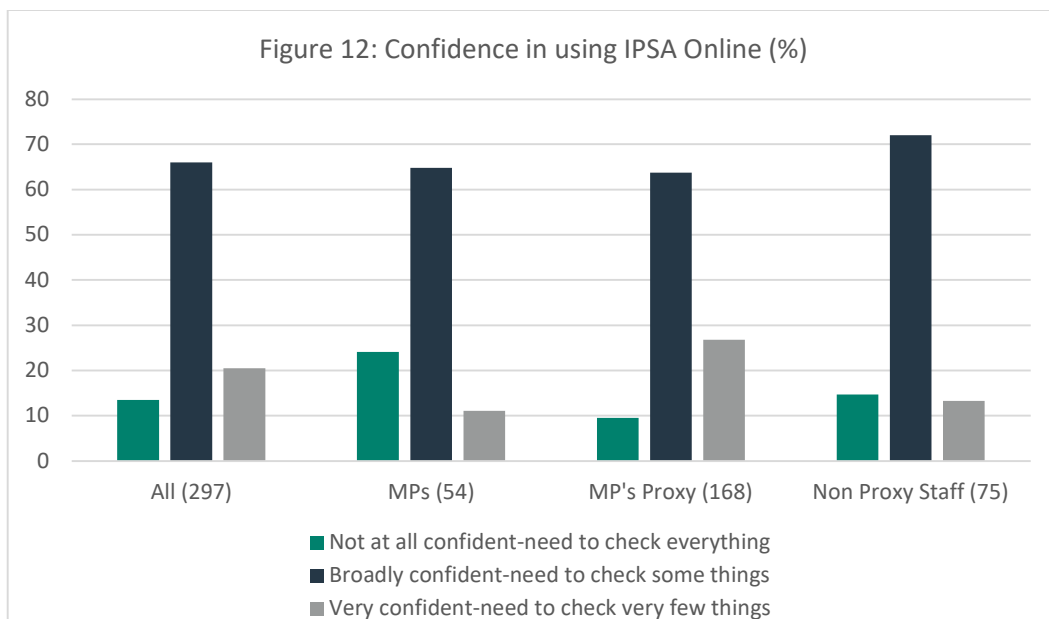
26. Figure 11 provides an indication as to why costs were not claimed, with the most common reason being concerns around publication, followed by the fact the claim was only for a small amount. MPs are entitled to claim for all business costs that are eligible under the Scheme and we do consider how best to ensure MPs are not disincentivised from making claims including through changes to publication. Similarly, we are concerned that staff are being left out of pocket and we are looking at longer-term solutions to mitigate against this, including how to ensure that staff members do not have to use their own money to pay for items.

Figure 11: Why was business cost was not claimed?	
Concerned about the claim being published	24.0%
Claim was only small	21.5%
Would take too long to submit claim	13.5%
The claim process was too complicated	11.1
There was not enough in the budget	7.7
*Selected answers. Respondents could select multiple responses.	

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IPSA Online

27. IPSA Online is the online system used by MPs and staff to submit and manage claims. It also provides payroll and finance services for offices, including running budget reports for office and staff costs. When asked about their confidence in using IPSA Online, 20.5% of respondents said that they were very confident in using IPSA Online. A further 66% stated that they were broadly confident, while 13.5% stated that they were not at all confident.



Survey comments

28. To provide more context and detail about how users view our services, we asked two main open-ended questions in the survey. The first question asked users about how they would improve services and also what other services would be useful. The second question is the final question in the survey and asked respondents for any additional comments they may have. Figure 13 shows how frequently an issue was raised across the two comment questions and also provides a flavour of typical comments that were made.

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Figure 13: Summary of Comments:

Theme	Typical Comments	Count
Account Management	Ensure clear, consistent advice. Can be difficult to get direct immediate advice over the phone. Sometimes response time to emails is slow and even no response at all. Improve customer service and understanding of MPs and their offices. Recent changes have improved service and staff often very helpful.	69
IPSA Online reports, accuracy and layout	Improve layout and usability of IPSA Online, reporting functionality. Signs of service improvement and regular updates are useful	67
Claim process and evidence	Provide clearer and more detailed evidence for returned claims. Inability to bulk upload, make repeat claims is time consuming. Clearer advice needed on what is claimable	38
Positive Feedback	Positive recent changes – systems have improved and named Account Managers very good. IPSA engaging and listening more. Relationship much more collaborative now. Very good help and support from many members of staff. Additional resources during the pandemic were welcomed.	27
Publication policy/regulatory approach	Publishing some claims in such detail creates safety and public trust issues. Avoid use of the term expenses. Assumption shouldn't be that MPs have done something wrong or that claims should be rejected. Remove staff sickness from overall expenditure	17
Communications	Continue to engage with offices. Engage more in face to face, one-to-one communications. IPSA to shadow actual offices, gather more qualitative feedback. Proactive engagement with public and press around business costs.	17
Payroll, payslips and HR	Fuller access to payroll data. Payslips area of website not intuitive, Off the shelf payroll package needed. My personal HR/payroll issues have taken a long time to resolve. More involvement needed in HR process e.g. when staff are made redundant.	13
Staffing budget, staff pay	Staffing budgets are too small to resource office properly. Staff are underpaid and over-worked, driving turnover. More flexibility needed e.g. around pay bands and job description and inner v. outer London pay.	13
The payment card	Need for proxy payment card. Processing of payment card expenses can be cumbersome	10
Proxy access	Higher levels of proxy access would better match proxy role e.g. Budgetary work, staffing forms such as contracts and overtime or leave requests	9

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Overall/other budgets	Blanket budgets need to be reviewed as costs differ across UK. Budgets not sufficient to run office e.g. cost of equipment. Budgets need to be settled earlier in the year. Budget for second homes is very tight. Need to ringfence training, health and welfare budget so it is used.	7
Training	More availability of one-to-one training, training on reporting, payroll, budgeting. Training often good quality, but mandatory training of MPs and proxy needed.	6
Property process and forms	Property registration forms can be difficult to resolve. Previous issues with IPSA processing rent payments incorrectly took up time. Property staff members helpful.	6
Disability support	Reasonable adjustments for volunteers as well as staff. Parity in provision of support provided to staff based in Westminster and staff based in constituency. Support not there for me in my personal circumstances	5
Central/shared service provision & more advice	UK wide contracts e.g. for broadband or contents insurance would save time and money for offices.	4
Forms and templates	Templates for repeat claims. All forms to be in one place and online e.g. unpaid holiday form. Provide examples of completed forms as a guide.	4
Annual leave tool	Allow Proxy's to view absence and annual leave data – would allow office managers to encourage staff to take leave. Annual leave tool not fit for purpose and many other options available.	3
Contract and job descriptions tool	Template contracts should be clearer. Job descriptions too generic and don't reflect actual roles and responsibilities which in turn impacts performance management. Email address doesn't accept large file size contracts.	3

Conclusion

29. The Annual User Survey is conducted every year and is an important way that we collect feedback on our performance. Findings from the survey present a picture of improvement with overall satisfaction levels showing that more than half of respondents – 51.8% rate our services as good. This is an increase from last year’s level of 34.8% and it suggests that our transformation programme, which has a clear focus on improvement is feeding through into a better user experience for customers.

30. We recognise though that there is more to be done. This is reflected in the fact that many users, albeit a minority, do not rate our service as good and is also reflected in some of the more specific findings in the survey. For example, users want: more immediate access to account manager support; more consistent advice; emails to be responded to quickly; and more detailed information in returned claims.

31. Such findings help inform our transformation programme, and a number of the changes discussed in the Survey Overview that are being implemented this year will help address the issues raised. These include a new CRM system which will better allow us to coordinate responses to customers and track response times; further improvements to IPSA Online; and continuing to improve advice provided through development of our quality assurance framework and improved training of staff.