

Findings from the Annual Survey of MPs and their Staff

March 2023



Findings from the Annual User Survey of MPs and their Staff

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Survey overview

Introduction

1. Every year, IPSA invites MPs and their staff to complete the Annual User Survey, which has been designed to assist us in understanding how our customers rate their user experience. This is one of a number of consultations conducted over the year which we use to gather feedback and assess our performance.
2. Our goal is to promote trust in our Parliamentary system, and to achieve this, we want to enable MPs to focus on what really matters by providing a seamless, regulatory service. The changes introduced as part of the transformation programme has resulted in a higher satisfaction rate in our services, which we hope to increase even further in 2023.
3. Recognising that services drastically needed to improve, since 2021 IPSA has been undergoing a range of transformative changes as part of a three-year strategy programme set out in our Corporate Plan. The findings from last year's survey showed that the initial changes that were introduced resulted in a higher satisfaction rate from respondents. Whereas in 2020 only 34.8% of users rated our services as good, in 2021 this increased to more than half of respondents – 51.9%.
4. 2022, the second year of the three-year transformation programme, saw many more changes introduced, aimed primarily at improving our services. The findings from the survey suggest these changes have again resulted in a higher satisfaction rate among respondents: for 2022, the level of satisfaction among users rose to 58.9%.
5. However, from the responses received, we can see that there is much work still to be done. 13.4% of users still rate our services as poor and the proportion of MPs who rate our services as good remains at less than half (42.3%), although this has improved significantly since last year (32.3%). Responses to the free-text questions also suggest that there are still opportunities for improvement in many areas, and thus our transformation programme will continue to address these remaining concerns.

Survey details

6. This year's survey ran from 6 December till 23 December 2022. We received 418 responses in total, with 52 responses from MPs, 217 from MPs' 'proxies' (nominated members of staff that are able to engage with IPSA on an MP's behalf), and 149 from other staff members. Comparing this to the response rate from 2021, there was a slight decrease in participation: there were 459 respondents last year, of whom 62 were MPs, 171 were MPs' proxies and 226 were other staff.

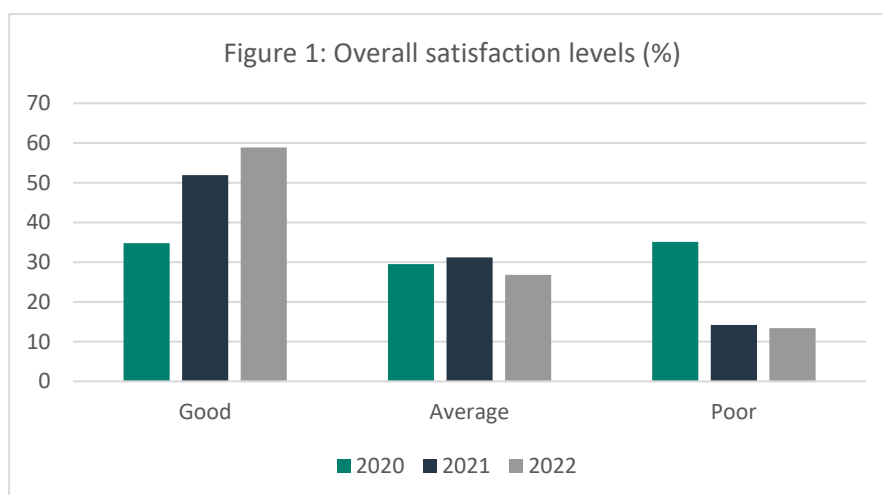
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- It is important to note that the participation rate, although higher than seen in previous years (before 2021), is still a low proportion of the total population of customers who received the survey (only 8% of MPs and 10.2% of staff members responded). The findings therefore may not be fully statistically representative of all customers. Even so, the findings provide an important insight into the experiences and views of our customers and highlights where our services provide the most value and areas we must improve. Taking this into consideration, it is worth highlighting that IPSA engages MPs and their staff via a number of different consultations throughout the year to ensure that we fully understand the issues that they face.

Key findings & satisfaction ratings

- Similar to last year's results, we can see that overall satisfaction ratings have improved. In 2022, 58.9% of customers rated IPSA's performance as good or very good. This is an increase on last year's figure of 51.9%, although this increase is not as drastic as the increase seen in 2021 (only 34.8% of respondents rated IPSA as good or very good in 2020). Despite the improvement, there are still many concerns and MPs still show a lower satisfaction level compared to their staff.



- The feedback received from the survey provides a more detailed understanding of the types of concerns MPs and their staff face and the improvements they would like to see. Reviewing the written responses from the free-text questions, the following themes emerged:
 - IPSA Online:** Customers continue to view the online system as clunky, hard to navigate, and systematically not user-friendly.
 - Email response times:** Customers think that email response times are slow, and responses often need to be chased. Customers also think having a direct email

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address or phone number for their Account Manager and Payroll Officer would be more helpful and the service level agreement for email response times should be shorter.

- **Account management:** Respondents want better access to their Account Manager – more in-person meetings, more available phone slots, and more proactive communication. Respondents also think email responses should be clearer and advice should be more consistent.
 - **Staff salaries:** Respondents think that staff salaries often don't reflect experience, workload, and location, and should be uplifted in-line with other similar organisations. Pay bands and job descriptions should also be reviewed.
 - **Policy consultation/media consideration:** After receiving a number of queries on what Christmas costs could be claimed for (most of which were about Christmas cards), IPSA published guidance setting out its established policy. This resulted in a lot of negative media attention and public dissatisfaction. As the majority of offices do not claim for these things, we received a lot of feedback urging IPSA to consult users before policies such as this are published. IPSA should also consider the media when making public statements in the future.
 - **Claims process:** Customers think the process for making claims is too slow and inefficient. The reasons claims are rejected are often unclear, some claims are rejected due to lack of evidence despite evidence being attached, and sometimes claims get stuck in a loop on the system due to its clunky interface.
 - **Payroll tools & reports:** Respondents think that the payroll tools and reports, such as the job description and staff contract generators and timesheet and overtime reports are overly complicated and accessing payslips is not user-friendly.
10. Other notable themes were dissatisfaction with the amounts allocated to MPs' budget; the process for claims being 'returned' on the system (for example where additional evidence is requested); and the process for reconciliation of payment card purchases. However, we were pleased to see widespread positive feedback again, especially from MPs' proxies. Customers recognise that IPSA is listening more to offices and actively seeking to strengthen relationships by improving its services. All feedback is being considered by relevant teams within IPSA and will help to inform future improvements to our services.

IPSA's Transformation Programme & the Regulatory Review

11. In 2021, IPSA began its three-year transformation programme designed to address the specific issues that had been raised by customers in previous surveys. We believe the changes introduced during this first year positively impacted the overall satisfaction of our customers, as was evident when looking at the results from last year's survey. A number of important changes were implemented, including the introduction of named Account Managers, improved training for IPSA staff, and an upgrade to the IPSA Online system.
12. In 2022, we introduced many more changes aimed at improving our services. We introduced customer service training and a quality assurance framework to monitor the quality of advice and of the service we offer to MPs and their staff. This shows an average of 90% of our calls graded good or great, closing the gap considerably between how important our services are and how satisfied users are with the service (service gap). Complaints more than halved during the year.
13. We have also worked hard to improve the online system that MPs and their staff use to administer their pay and business costs, delivering a significant number of enhancements. This includes developing payment forms to expedite the process for urgent payments; improving business cost tracking to provide clear information about pending claims; increasing the number of alerts to notify customers of action required in relation to business costs; introducing a payment card for office proxies to ensure smooth and efficient purchasing of business goods; and improving data quality to support better interactions with MPs and their staff. This has reduced the amount of time MPs and their staff spend administering their pay and business costs by c.12,000 hours over the past two years.
14. Processes have been simplified and the time taken to reimburse claims has dropped from an average of 4.84 days in 2019 to 2.6 days in 2022, even though claims volumes have risen to near pre-pandemic levels.
15. We have also improved access to our services for MPs and their staff to reduce the time it takes to contact IPSA. Consistency and timeliness of advice has also improved, resulting in high compliance with the Scheme.
16. As we reach the third year of transformation, we have embarked on a wider review of IPSA's regulatory approach, creating a new regulatory philosophy and guiding principles that will provide the framework for new or revised rules and more targeted, risk-based regulation. We will also review our approach to setting MPs' budgets and seek to deliver better value for money through introducing more centralised services.
17. While IPSA Online meets the need for IPSA to consolidate administering business and staffing costs across all MPs' offices and the user experience has improved, the

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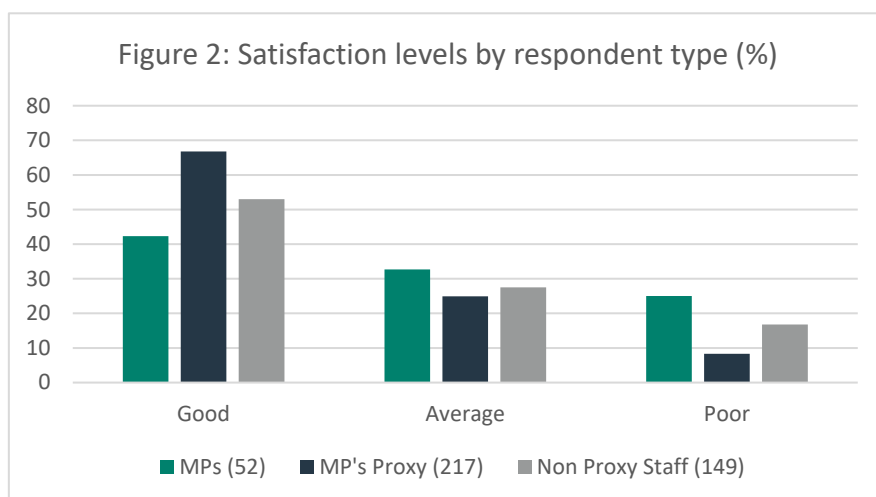
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system needs further development. We are currently designed a new user front end that will enable a much better user experience as well as integrating IPSA Online to our other operating systems. Both initiatives will significantly reduce cost, simplify the user experience, and improve overall service.

Survey findings in detail

Satisfaction levels

- 18. 58.9% of the 418 respondents rated IPSA’s overall performance as good or very good. This is an improvement on last year’s figure of 51.9% and a drastic improvement considering the figure of 34.8% in 2020. However, it is still below the rating achieved in 2018 (67.7%) and our organisational ambition.
- 19. Tracking the satisfaction levels across the different types of respondents, higher satisfaction levels (as measured by those rating services as good or very good) were given by MPs’ proxies and other staff (66.8% and 53% respectively), while ratings, although drastically improved from last year’s results, were the lowest for MPs at 42.3% (32.3% in 2021). In annual surveys, MPs have typically given IPSA lower satisfaction ratings when compared to staff members. Although in previous years MPs tended to comment on areas related to publication and IPSA’s overall regulatory approach, rather than the services which staff members focused on, this year MPs particularly focused on IPSA Online and IPSA’s consideration, or lack thereof, of media/public perceptions when making public statements, both of which were also commented on by many staff members. This is not surprising after the backlash of the publication on the guidance on Christmas claims, but clearly highlights the key areas all users think we need to improve upon.



Satisfaction with individual services

- 20. In addition to asking about the overall satisfaction levels of customers, the survey also asked how satisfied users are with individual services. So that we can calculate a ‘service gap’, we also asked respondents how important each service is to them. This allows us to measure the ‘service gap’ by deducting the score provided for how important a service is from how satisfied respondents are with that service.

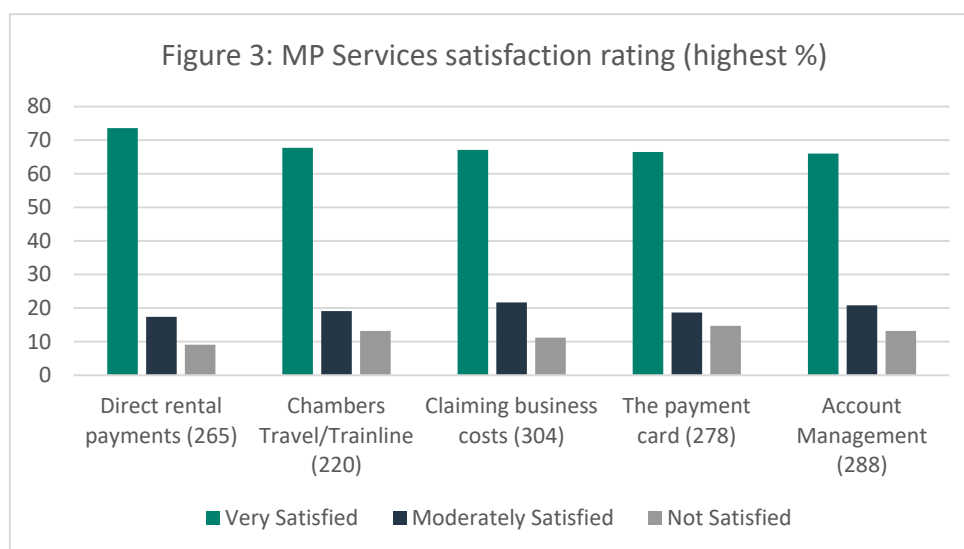
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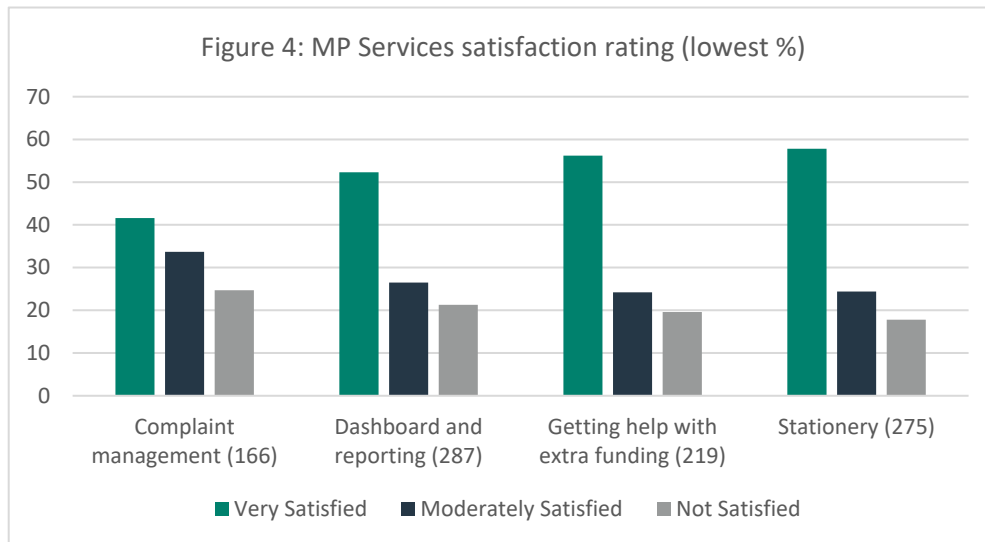
21. This approach not only gives us a quantitative understanding of customer satisfaction as a whole, but also gives us a more detailed insight into which services users are most and least satisfied with, the reasons why, and what steps we can take to improve them. Feedback also helps us identify what additional services our customers require to support them in performing their parliamentary duties. The open-text comments are discussed in further detail towards the end of this report.

Satisfaction ratings

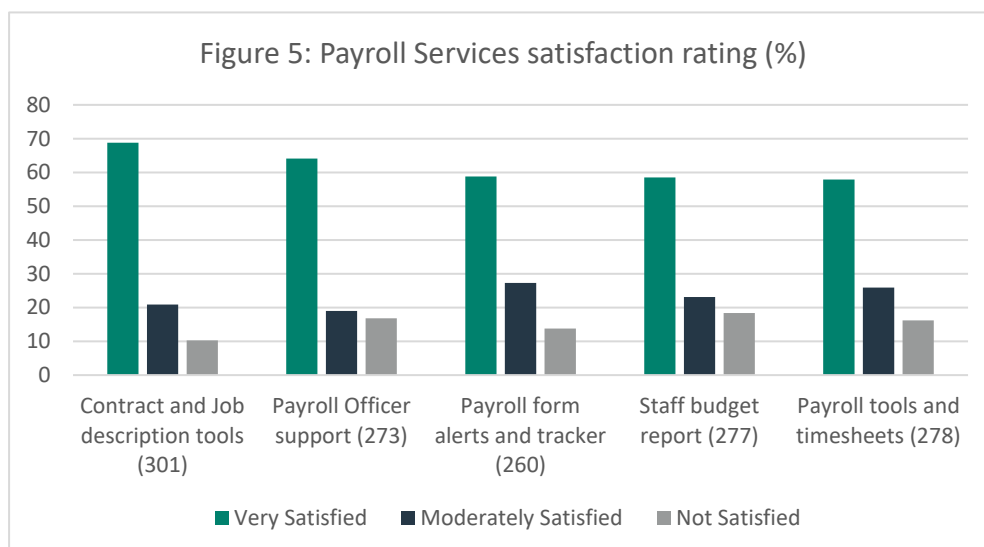
22. In the survey, respondents were asked to give individual services a satisfaction rating between one and five, with one representing 'not satisfied at all' and five representing 'very satisfied'. The two graphs (figures 3 and 4) show those MP Services with the highest satisfaction ratings and those 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'.
23. A lot of IPSA's key front-facing services are delivered by the MP Services team, who are the initial point of contact for MPs and staff. Each MP's office is supported by a named Account Manager within the team. Services such as direct rental payments, the payment card, account management, and claiming business costs have higher satisfaction ratings, while services such as complaint management, dashboard, and reporting, getting help with extra funding such as disability, contingency or security, and direct stationery providers have lower satisfaction ratings. Despite this, the majority of services still have a high satisfaction rating overall compared to previous years. The figures in brackets show the number of respondents for each question, excluding respondents who answered, 'not applicable'.



Survey findings in detail

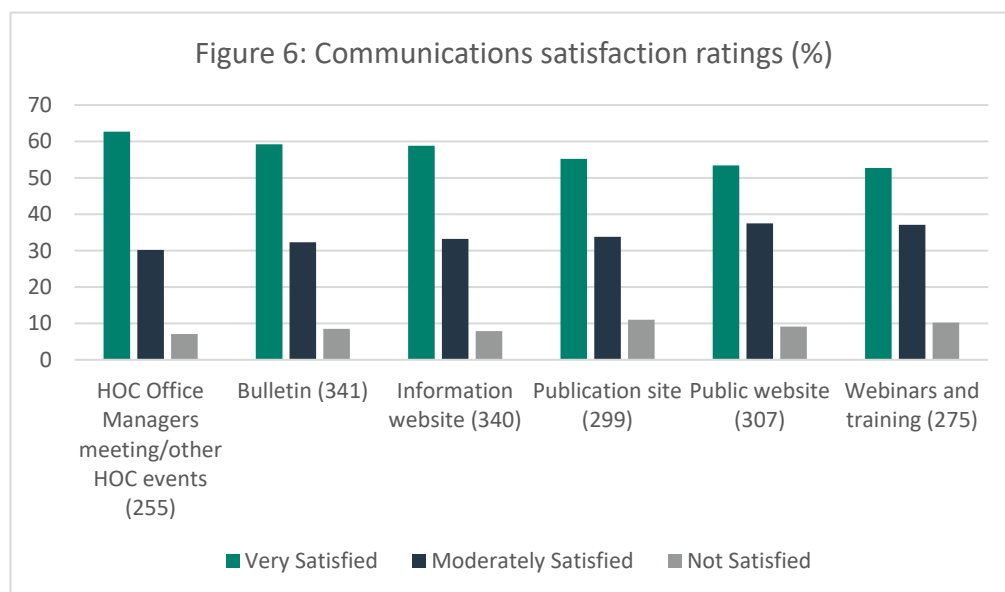


24. The same set of questions were asked for a number of payroll-related services, which showed that a majority of respondents were very satisfied with all services, especially when compared to previous years. Similarly to last year, the contract and job description tools were rated the highest, followed by Payroll Officer support. The staff budget and payroll tools and timesheets have the lowest satisfaction ratings.



25. As IPSA is keen to provide information to users in the most efficient way possible, the survey asked respondents to rate how satisfied they were with how we communicate information. Highest satisfaction ratings were given to IPSA's attendance at the House of Commons' Office Manager meetings and similar events, the bulletin, and the information website for MPs and staff. The lowest satisfaction ratings were for the public website, similar to last year's findings, and webinars and training.

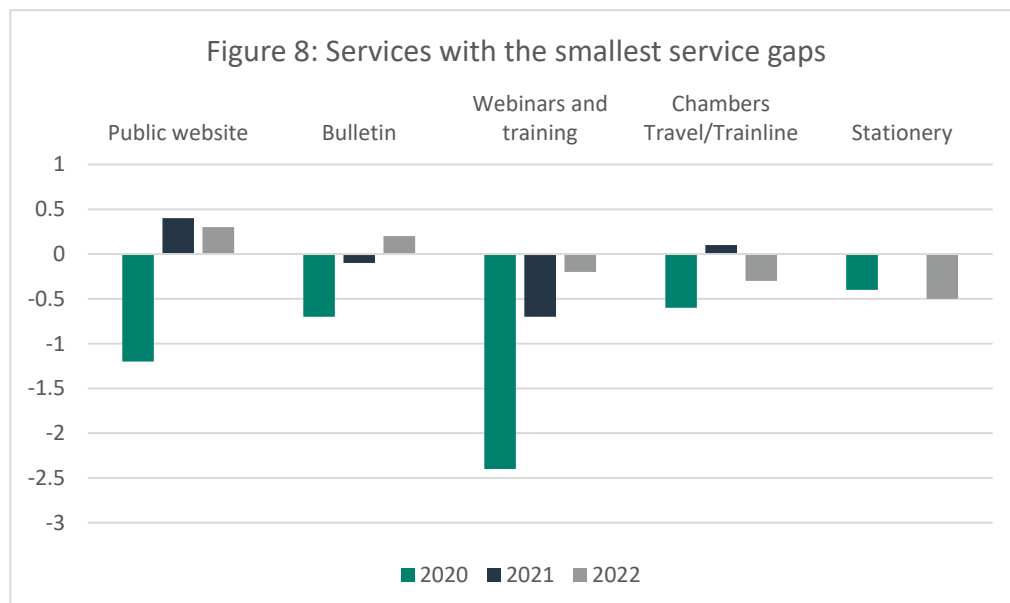
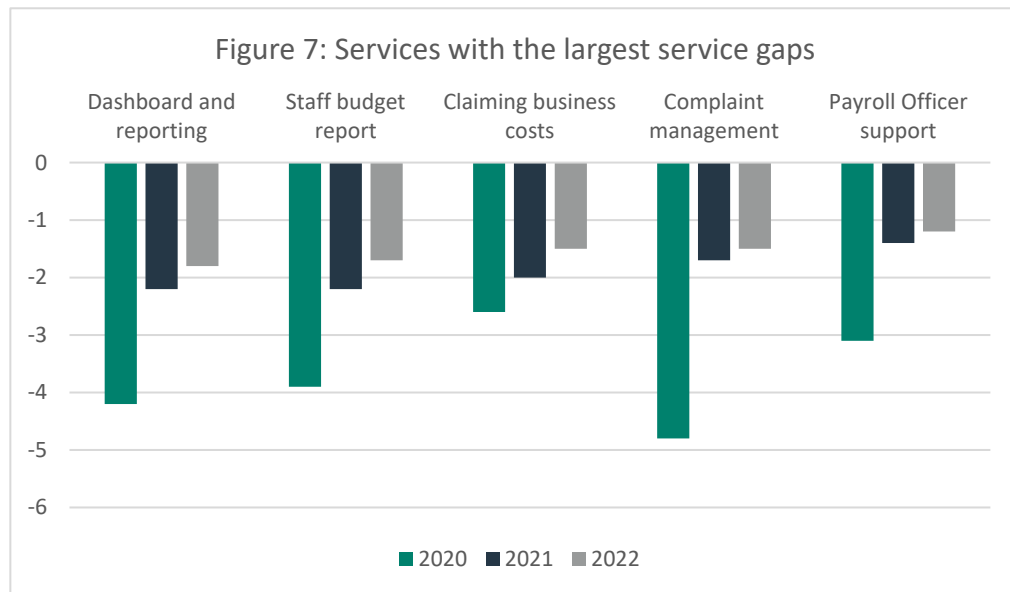
Survey findings in detail



Service gaps

26. To calculate the 'service gaps' for individual services, the importance score given by a respondent is subtracted 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.
27. Figure 7 shows the services with the largest service gap and provides a comparison with the service gaps for 2020 and 2021. Figure 8 shows the services with the smallest service gap. Although the service 'IPSA participation in the House of Common's Office Manager meeting and other House of Commons events' has one of the smallest service gaps (a service gap of zero), it has not been included in this graph as the service gap for 2020 was not measured and so it cannot be compared. Full details of the service gaps for all individual services, along with importance and satisfaction ratings are provided in Figure 9 and Figure 10.
28. While the findings still show that services such as the dashboard and reporting, the staff budget report and claiming business costs still have large service gaps, we can see these have significantly reduced since 2020. The findings also indicate that our communication services have the smallest service gaps.

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Figure 9: MP Services: average service gaps*

Services	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap 2022	Gap 2021	Gap 2020
Named Account Manager	8.3	7.7	-0.9	-1.5	-3.7
Claiming business costs	9.1	7.7	-1.5	-2.0	-2.6
Dashboard and budget reporting	8.5	7.0	-1.8	-2.2	-4.2
The IPSA payment card	8.6	7.7	-1.1	-1.0	-1.5
Direct rental payments	8.8	8.3	-0.8	-0.8	-2.4
Travel: Chambers travel/Trainline	7.6	7.8	-0.3	0.1	-0.6
Stationery: Banner/Commercial/XMA	7.6	7.3	-0.5	0.0	-0.4
Getting help with extra funding such as security, disability, or contingency	7.9	7.2	-1.1	-0.9	-1.0
Complaint management	7.5	6.5	-1.5	-1.7	-4.8

*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 10: Payroll, communications, and other services: average service gaps*

Services	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap 2022	Gap 2021	Gap 2020
Named Payroll Officer	8.5	7.6	-1.2	-1.4	-3.1
Payroll tools and timesheets	7.9	7.3	-0.8	-1.5	-2.3
Staff budget report	8.7	7.2	-1.7	-2.2	-3.9
Contract and job description tools	8.8	7.9	-1.0	-1.4	-1.4
Payroll forms alerts and tracker	8.3	7.5	-1.1	N/A	N/A
Publication site to check your publication data	7.7	7.3	-0.8	N/A	N/A
Webinars and training	7.0	7.2	-0.2	-0.7	-2.4
MPs information website (www.ipsonline.org.uk)	8.1	7.5	-0.6	-0.7	-2.4
The Bulletin	7.3	7.5	0.2	-0.1	-0.7
IPSA public website (www.theipso.org.uk)	6.8	7.3	0.3	0.4	-1.2
HOC joint events & Office Managers	7.3	7.7	0.0	-0.1	N/A

*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)

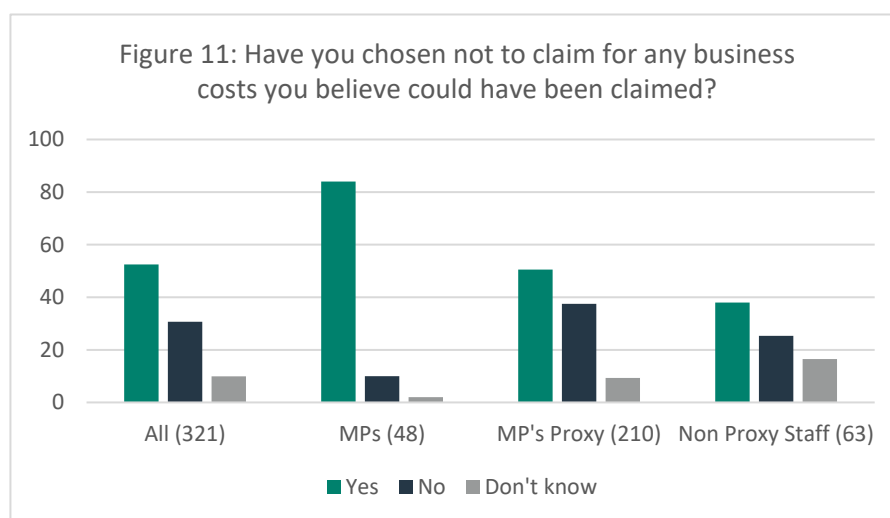
Claiming business costs

29. One of IPSA's key roles is to regulate what MPs can and can't claim for under the Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs. To achieve this, IPSA requires MPs to submit claims, which are then subject to approval through IPSA's validation process. A claim is only allowed if it adheres to the Scheme and the required evidence has been provided.
30. If claims are made which do not fall within the Scheme rules (for instance, where the required evidence has not been provided), IPSA returns the claim to the MP and/or staff member via IPSA Online along with a note explaining the reason for return. Asked whether the notes were clear on returned claims, only 28.4% of respondents whose claim had recently been returned stated that the notes were not

Survey findings in detail

clear. This is a significant reduction from last year (38.2%), but we recognise that this is still a problematic area that needs to be improved upon. IPSA's Validation team are currently undergoing a review of the lifecycle of a claim and how this process can be improved in general. This will include looking at how to improve the visibility of the explanatory notes when they are returned.

31. Respondents were also asked whether they had chosen not to claim for a business cost which they believed could have been claimed. Figure 11 shows that over half of respondents (52.5%) answered yes, including 84% of MPs.



32. Figure 12 shows the reasons respondents gave for why they did not claim for certain costs, with the most common reason being because customers were concerned about the claim being published, followed by the claim cost being small. IPSA is clear that MPs are entitled to make claims for legitimate business costs under the rules and should not feel unable or be disincentivised from doing so. We are currently looking into solutions to mitigate against this through our transformation programme, including a review of our reimbursement model to further reduce the administrative burden MPs and their staff experience. We are also reviewing the way we publish business costs to ensure that MPs are comfortable claiming the funding they are entitled to, while also providing the public with a meaningful picture of what it costs to run an MP's office.

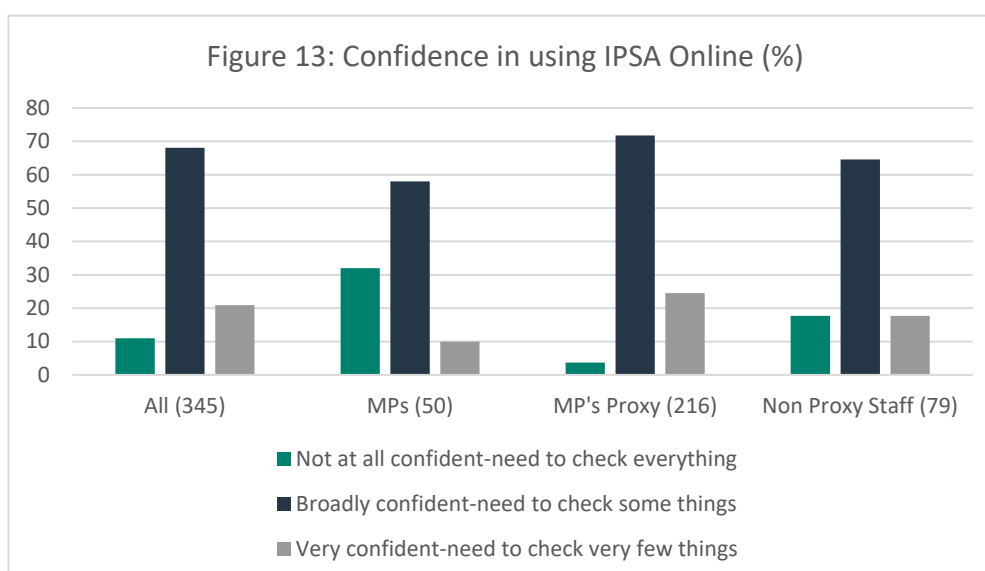
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Figure 12: For which of the following reasons have you not claimed a business cost?

The claim process was too complicated	8.6%
It was only a small claim	21.5%
It would take too long	9.9%
I wasn't sure if it was claimable	5.4%
I wasn't sure what amount I could claim for	1.1%
I was concerned about the claim being published	18.7%
I was worried the claim would be rejected	3.7%
There was not enough in the budget	3.7%
I lost the receipt	9.9%
I didn't want it to be published	11.4%

IPSA Online

33. IPSA Online is the online system MPs and their staff use to submit and manage their business and staffing costs. When asked about their confidence in using IPSA Online, 20.9% of respondents said that they were very confident in using IPSA Online, 68.1% stated that they were broadly confident, and 11% stated that they were not at all confident.



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Survey comments

34. To understand better the context and detail of how users view our services, we asked three main free-text questions in the survey. The first question asked users what they thought IPSA currently does well. The intention of this question was to get an insight into how the recent changes introduced via the transformation programme has impacted our customers. Figure 14 shows the most frequently occurring theme in the comments, and Figure 15 goes into further detail on the comments that were made.

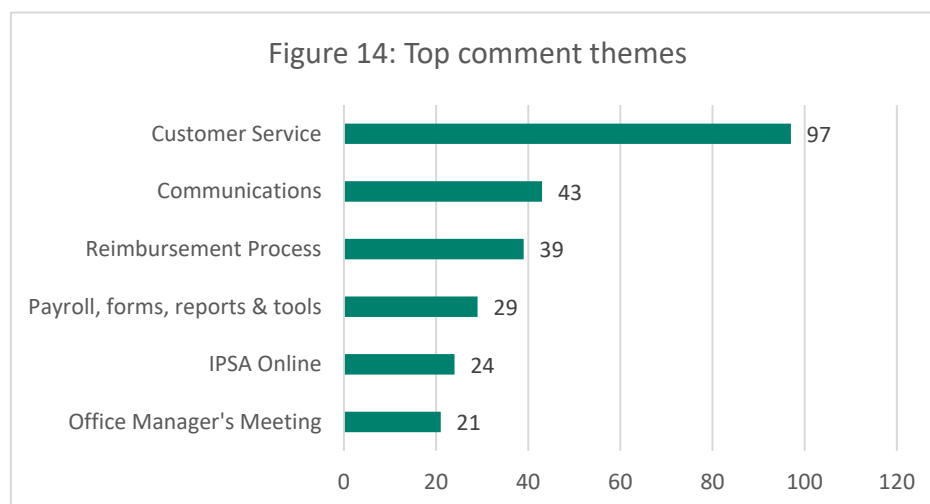


Figure 15: Summary of comments for question 'What does IPSA do well?'

Theme	Typical Comments	Count
Customer service	Support is more readily available, phone support is good, staff are helpful, and proactive support is improving. Having a named Account Manager and Payroll Officer works well.	97
Communications	Communication has improved. Email updates are useful, and the bulletin has improved content wise, although amount of information could be reduced further.	43
Making claims	The process is a lot more efficient and reimbursement claims get paid a lot quicker.	39
Payroll, forms, reports & tools	Payroll Officer support is helpful, salary is paid on time, forms are easy to complete, and job description and contract templates are useful.	29
IPSA Online	Payslips are easy to access, the dashboard works, and overall navigation of system has improved. System alerts and payroll tools also mentioned.	24
Office Managers' Meeting	IPSA's participation at the OM meetings are helpful and it shows IPSA are more engaged.	21
Negative feedback	Concerns over IPSA Online, email response times and IPSA's public engagement.	12
Other	Standard processing and basic services are done well.	11

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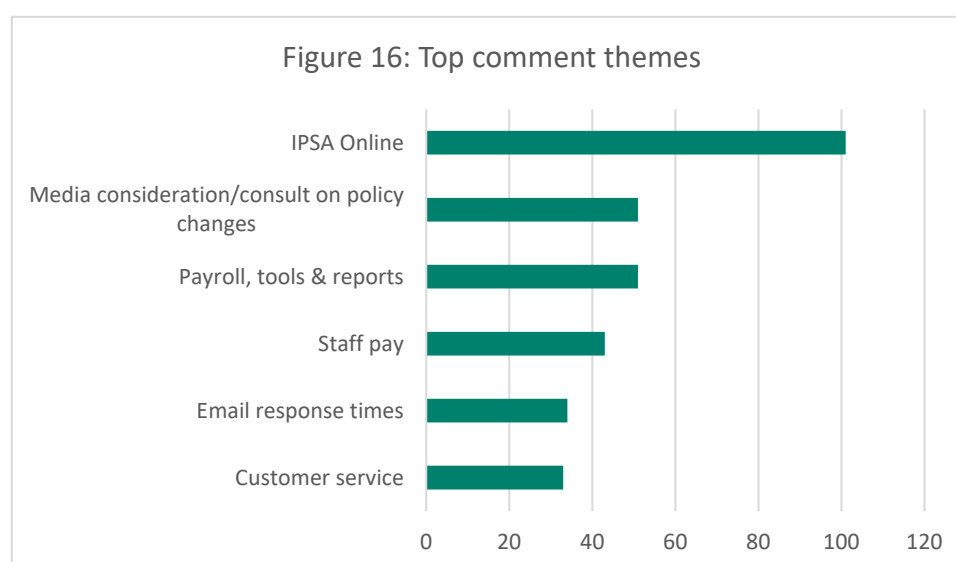
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General positive feedback	IPSA has noticeably improved its services and strengthened its relationship with MPs' offices.	8
Budgets	Easy to manage budgets.	6
Public website & MPs' information website	The public facing website (www.theipsa.org.uk) is good and MPs' information website (www.ipsaonline.org.uk) is easier to navigate and the guidance is helpful.	6
Training	Training and webinars are helpful.	5
Direct rental payments	The management of direct rental payments is good.	4
Payment card	The reconciliation process is straightforward and the payment card for proxies is working well.	4
Other themes*	Other themes include improvement in building public confidence, strengthening relationship with MPs' offices, positive comments on leadership, the MP Staff User Group, Publication, IPSA's overall regulation, the Scheme, ensuring accountability and taking responsibility.	11

The count column shows the number of times a theme was mentioned, rather than the number of responses. As most user comments included reference to a number of different themes, the number of mentions will equal a different amount to the number of participants in the survey.

*Other themes include all comment categories which received two comments or less.

35. The second question asked respondents what more could IPSA do to improve and the final question in the survey asked respondents whether they had anything else to add. Figure 16 shows the top comment themes across the two questions and Figure 17 goes into more detail on the comments that were made.



Survey findings in detail

Figure 17: Summary of comments for question ‘What more could IPSA do to improve’ and ‘Do you have anything else to add?’.

Theme	Typical Comments	Count
IPSA Online	The online system is not user-friendly, is hard to navigate, the reports are often out of date and hard to generate/access; the system in general is too complicated to use.	101
Media consideration/consult on policy changes	IPSA should have more consideration when making and publishing policy changes of the media and public perception. MPs and staff should be consulted before. This is in reference to IPSA publishing guidance on Christmas claims. Staffing costs should also not be included with other running costs in publication.	51
Payroll, tools & reports	Payroll reports and tools, such as the job and contract generator and timesheet and overtime reports, are overly complicated. Payslips are hard to access and should be emailed instead.	51
Staff pay	Staff pay does not reflect experience, workload, and location. Pay should be in line with other similar organisations, pay bands should be uplifted, and job descriptions should be more accurate.	43
Email response times	Email response times are slow and often responses have to be chased. The email turnaround time should be quicker than three to five working days.	34
Customer service	Staff are sometimes hard to get in touch with. Having a direct contact for Account Manager's and Payroll Officers would be better. Respondents want better access to their account manager, more in-person meetings, more available phone slots, phone calls returned more quickly, and better proactive communication.	33
Positive feedback	Services are improving. IPSA are listening and building a stronger relationship with MPs' offices.	29
Budgets	Budgets should be uplifted to take into account the cost-of-living crisis and should be communicated earlier so customers can plan for the financial year. The one size fits all approach is not realistic nor fair.	24
Payment card	The process is complex and not user-friendly. IPSA are too strict with the reconciliation deadline. Direct debits should be allowed. However, payment cards for proxies is appreciated.	23
Public engagement	Although IPSA has made progress with public engagement, more work should be done in this area.	20
Guidance	Guidance on allowable costs is not sufficient. Sometimes guidance is vague and leaves a lot to interpretation. 'How to' guidance is not easy to find on the information website.	19
Returned claims	Reasons for claims being rejected are sometimes unclear, claims are sometimes rejected due to lacking evidence despite the evidence being attached, and often claims get stuck in a system loop due to its clunky interface.	19
Pooled interpreter service	A translation/interpretation service (including British sign language) should be provided to assist with casework.	18
Claims process	The claims process takes too long and is inefficient.	17

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Communications	Communications on system changes are appreciated. IPSA should be careful which email address communication is sent to, so all staff don't see private communication. More proactive communication on process changes needed.	15
Training	More training should be offered, especially for new staff. More training on Payroll processes, IPSA Online and budget management is needed.	13
Proxy privileges	IPSA should allow multiple proxies for business costs to reduce workload of the main proxy and mitigate issues if someone is on annual leave. Proxies should be given same viewing privileges as MPs (e.g. remittances).	11
Other	Comments include having a way to upload mileage claims in bulk, having services that are better value for money, and positive feedback on proxies being given payment cards.	10
Publication	IPSA should stop publishing individual claims and publish as a budget total. The publication of first-class train tickets was also mentioned as unnecessary. Publication should not be a one size fits all approach and should highlight differences between constituency types. IPSA needs to be more sensitive about what is published.	9
Better/more consistent advice	Advice from staff is sometime not clear or consistent.	8
Simpler processes	Systems and processes are slow, complicated, and too laborious. Processes should be simpler and more intuitive. Claiming should be more streamlined, and IPSA should look into centralisation of services.	8
Staff support	IPSA should provide more support to MPs staff (emotional and work support).	6
Discretion/flexibility	IPSA should be more flexible with claims and allow more discretion; they should be less authoritarian, less rigid, and more adaptable to new issues.	5
Health & wellbeing	More funding should be allocated to workplace support for staff. For instance, employee health insurance and better counselling services. IPSA should make it more known that funding is available for health and wellbeing.	5
Security funding	The process of applying to security is slow and complicated and funding should be offered for more things.	5
General negative feedback	It takes a long time for mistakes to be rectified. IPSA is not good value for money - it should be more streamlined and efficient.	5
Direct rental payments	Rent payments are sometimes late and incorrect. IPSA should contact the landlord directly if there is an issue with the rent payment.	4
Record keeping	The accuracy of records kept needs to be improved. IPSA should provide better advice for staff on record-keeping.	4
Property process	More help when dealing with landlords should be provided by IPSA. The office renewal process could be simplified.	4
Disability funding	Disability funding is not sufficient. IPSA should use Access for Work to reduce the length of the process.	2
<p>The count column shows the number of times a theme was mentioned, rather than the number of responses. As most user comments included reference to a number of different themes, the number of mentions will equal a different amount to the number of participants in the survey.</p>		

Conclusion

36. The Annual User Survey is conducted every year and is a vital way for us to collect feedback on our performance. Findings from the survey show an improvement with 58.9% of respondents rating IPSA's services as good. This is a notable improvement from last year's level of 51.8%. This suggests that the second year of our three-year transformation programme has been successful in improving the overall user experience for our customers.
37. Despite the improvements, we realise there are still areas of concern and therefore understand there is more to be done. For instance, users want IPSA Online to be made more user-friendly, emails response times shortened, IPSA should consider staff pay, consult more on policy changes, and take into account media and public perception, and make payroll tools and reports less complicated and easier to use.
38. These findings directly inform our transformation programme, and a number of the changes we aim to introduce this next year, which were discussed in the Survey Overview, will support us in addressing the issues raised in the survey. These include completing a wider review of IPSA's regulatory approach and improving the online system.