

Findings from the Annual Survey of MPs and their Staff

March 2021

IPSA

Executive Summary

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 and provide an opportunity for MPs and staff to give us feedback.
2. During 2020, much of IPSA's focus was on supporting new MPs who entered Parliament at the December 2019 General Election, as well as former MPs who were winding up their affairs. The year was of course also overshadowed by the pandemic and as such it has been a challenging year both for MPs' offices and for IPSA. Offices have told us that there has been an unprecedented increase in casework. Lockdowns, difficulties accessing offices and switching to home working have all added to the obstacles faced by MPs and their staff.
3. For IPSA, due to lack of access to our own office we took the decision to temporarily close our phonedlines. We are aware that this has had an impact on the service that users receive. When we reopened our phone service, we shifted to a system of call bookings. This was with the aim of continuing to provide support to MPs' offices over the phone, while looking after our staff, who were all adjusting to working remotely. However, this has meant that MPs' offices have not been able to receive the direct, immediate support that they would expect or we would like to provide. It has also meant that receiving advice on sometimes simple matters has been made more complex.
4. After the difficult introduction of IPSA Online, the online expenses, payroll and finance system, in April 2019, we worked hard during the past year to make improvements including: better and more detailed reports; email alerts for approved and returned claims; and in depth research with users to understand exactly what changes need to be made. However, we know that the system is not yet functioning in the way that users expect. Added to this are other issues, some of them longstanding, that the survey has highlighted, for instance, difficulty getting resolution of complex issues, and the wish for better explanations of returned claims.
5. A summary of these issues can be found in the key findings, but we are aware – and the satisfaction ratings in the survey and the comments received confirm this – that the service we provide is not yet at the level both we and our customers expect. IPSA has reconfirmed its commitment to improve and is embarking on an ambitious transformation programme which we believe will see real differences to the service we provide.

6. We have refreshed and clarified our vision, which is: to enable MPs to focus on what really matters by providing an exemplary, seamless, regulatory service. We will be making changes which we believe will result in real improvements to the services MPs and staff receive. Fuller details of these changes are outlined just below the key findings. They include system improvements, changes to the structure of teams delivering support and better training for IPSA staff, to improve the consistency of advice we provide.
7. No doubt next year when we conduct the survey there will be areas for improvement identified. But we also hope by then to have implemented meaningful change that results in a noticeably better service for MPs and MPs' staff.

Survey Participation

8. The 2020 Annual User Survey was conducted between 19th November and 18th December 2020. In total, we received 303 responses – 41 from MPs, 152 from MPs' proxies and 109 from other staff. For comparison, there were 243 respondents last year of whom 56 were MPs, 121 were MPs' proxies and 66 were other staff. (13 of the MPs last year had already stood down at the 2019 General Election).
9. The relatively low numbers of MPs and staff participating means that less than 10% of MPs and their staff took part in the survey. It is therefore difficult to gauge how representative the survey findings are of views across all MPs' offices. For this reason, the findings provide a valuable snapshot of the views and experiences of some MPs and their staff, without being a statistically definitive portrait of all users.
10. The annual survey is only one of the ways in which IPSA engages with and seeks feedback from MPs and their staff about our service. One of the intentions of our transformation programme is to develop better ways of engaging with and understanding the needs of our service users.

Key Findings & Satisfaction Ratings

11. Overall, of the 303 respondents, 34.8% rated IPSA's performance as good or very good. This is an improvement on last year's rating (25.1%), but it is still far below where we were in 2018 (67.7%) and falls short of the standards which we measure ourselves against.



12. The survey responses, and in particular the written comments, provide a more detailed understanding of the type of issues MPs and their staff have and the improvements they would like to see. Although the following list does not cover every issue that the survey raised, it covers what we take to be the most significant and frequent issues:

- **Contacting IPSA:** Respondents want to be able to call IPSA. They also want faster responses to enquiries as slow responses to small enquiries have a knock-on effect on workloads.
- **Account managers:** Ongoing relationship with named account managers is wanted.
- **Advice:** Clearer and more detailed advice wanted. Faster resolution or escalation of complex issues and prioritisation of urgent claims. Wish for 'right-first-time' advice.
- **IPSA Online:** IPSA online is clunky and difficult to use and navigate.
- **Budgets and reporting:** Dissatisfaction with the budgets and reporting functionality. It does not provide the information needed and it is not always accurate or up-to-date.

- **Notifications & alerts:** Staff want better notification and alerts, e.g. when claims are returned. Notifications need to be sent to proxies and/or staff members as well as MPs.
- **Explanation of returned claims:** More and clearer detail is needed when claims are returned
- **Complaints management:** Respondents are dissatisfied with complaints management and want a more visible procedure in place

IPSA's Transformation Programme

13. While we recognise that current levels of satisfaction with our service are not where they should be, we are also an organisation that is changing. We are embarking on an ambitious three-year transformation programme intended to enable MPs to focus on what really matters by providing an exemplary, seamless regulatory service.
14. Some of those changes are quick wins and will make a noticeable difference during 2021. Other changes will take longer to emerge. It is positive to note that many of the changes will directly address the key themes and issues that MPs and staff have highlighted in this survey. Among the changes that will be implemented are:
- **An integrated MP Services team:** A key part of the transformation programme will involve changes to the way we deliver our MP support services. We are combining all our customer facing roles into a single MP Services team. Whereas before it could be difficult for service users to identify the right point of contact, the new structure will mean a fully joined-up support service regardless of the help needed. This in turn will lead to easier access to the advice needed and faster resolution of more complex issues.
 - **Regional approach and named account managers:** MP Services will be delivered on a regional basis which will allow IPSA staff to develop closer relationships with offices and a better understanding of their needs. We will also be implementing named account managers for each office, which was one of the changes that survey respondents called for most frequently.
 - **Improved training for IPSA staff:** In addition to the new structure for MP Services, the team delivering MP support services, there will also be improved training for IPSA staff. This is to ensure that they can provide better advice and higher quality customer service. Training needs for staff will be reviewed and IPSA will be implementing a learning and development strategy with a focus on supporting high-quality customer service. The purpose is to develop a 'right-first-time' advice culture saving time for users and leaving them more satisfied with the service they receive.

- **Quality Monitoring:** Underpinning the improvements for MP Services will be a quality monitoring and coaching framework.

This will involve a regular sampling of all contacts with MPs and their staff to ensure that the quality of our service improves. There will also be better collection of data about our customer service performance including clearer objectives for teams and clearly defined service standards. This will allow us to see where teams are not meeting KPIs. Performance will also be benchmarked against external comparators.

- **IPSA Online upgrades and budget reporting:** To improve the usability of IPSA Online, there will be a major upgrade of the system. This will address some of the perceived 'clunkiness' of the system. It will also improve things like the MP budgets dashboard and alerts and mean that forms will start to be auto-populated. As a result, the system will be easier to navigate, errors will be reduced and time saved. The improvements to IPSA Online will mean increased visibility over budgets and more pro-active budget support including alerts, check-ins and cost information all in one place. Prior to making further improvements to the budget reporting functionality, we have been holding in depth interviews with users to fully understand what changes need to be made.
- **More training for MPs and MPs' staff:** So that users can make the most of IPSA Online we will be enhancing the training that we provide. New MPs and staff will receive inductions on the system and we will be improving the training support available to existing users. We will also provide additional guidance for IPSA Online including an intuitive 'How To' guide.
- **Expansion of notifications:** To ensure that the appropriate members of staff receive notifications, we will expand their distribution so that proxies see more notifications. Already, email alerts have been introduced to notify users of approved, returned and rejected claims.
- **Better explanation of returned claims:** Better staff training is intended to ensure that consistent, accurate, claim advice is provided to MPs' offices. We will also be regularly reviewing evidence guidance to ensure that it is more appropriate, suitable for digital processes and accords with the level of risk. Central to this will be better engagement of users to allow IPSA to gather feedback about the claims process and take steps to simplify or improve it.

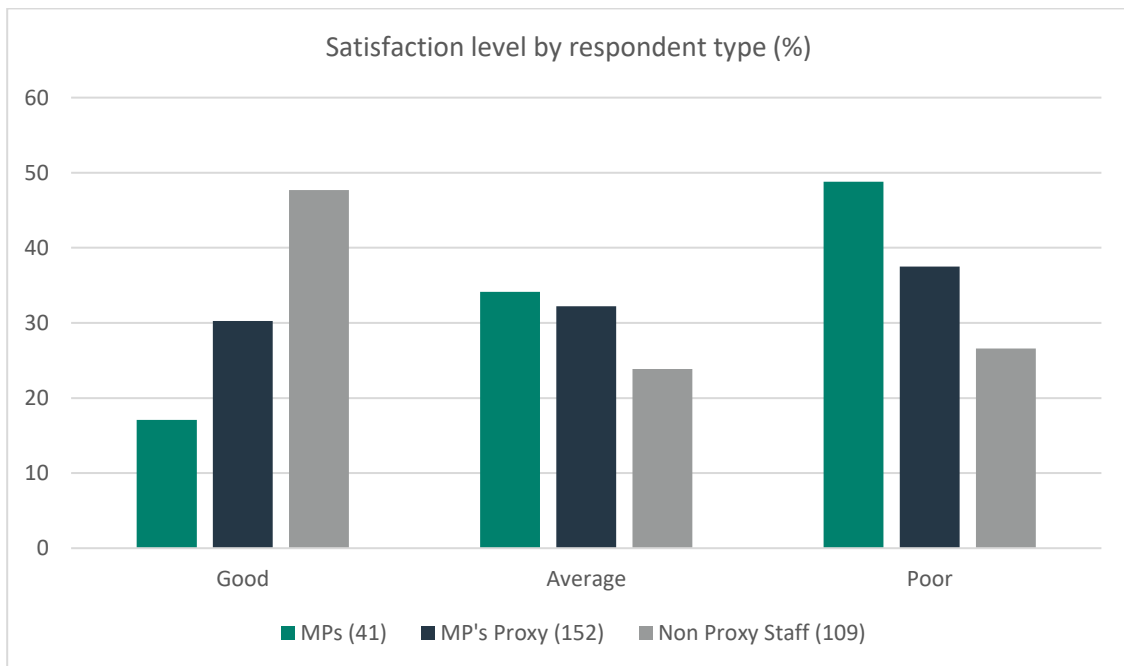
- **Complaints management:** Complaints will be handled within MP Services and recorded in our new Customer Relationship Management system. This data will be analysed by our Risk and Assurance Team and Strategy and Change Team to ensure we continually improve. We will also be bolstering the complaints handling process with administrative support which will improve the way that complaints are dealt with.
- **Formal engagement strategy:** We will be developing a formal user engagement and information strategy so that we engage better with MPs and staff. Already we have held in depth interviews with some users of IPSA Online which have provided valuable information. We will be developing a more collaborative approach where users are imputing into the design and improvement of systems and processes. This will result in a greater understanding of the needs of MPs and staff, with services shaped accordingly. The new strategy will also cover how we keep MPs and staff informed of services and updates. In response to comments that the Bulletin can contain too much information, more use of single message emails will be used to raise awareness of important information and deadlines.

Survey Findings In Detail

Satisfaction Levels

15. Every year the survey asks a series of questions to find out how satisfied users are with the services provided. As noted in the summary, overall, 34.8% of the 303 respondents rated IPSA's performance as good or very good. This is a slight improvement on the 25.1% from last year, but it is below levels in 2018 (67.7%) and more importantly, below where IPSA wants to be as an organisation.

16. Looking at how satisfaction levels differ for the various types of respondent, the 41 MPs participating gave the lowest satisfaction ratings, with the 152 proxies and 109 non proxy staff members giving higher ratings.



17. The survey introduced a new question this year asking whether IPSA's service has improved, stayed the same or got worse. The question was answered by 235 of the 303 participants. Only 15.7% of those surveyed said that the service had improved, while 48.9% said that it stayed the same and 35.3% said it had got worse. These responses are in contrast to the overall satisfaction levels, which improved compared with last year. It is not completely clear why this is the case, but significantly fewer participants answered this question which might explain some of the difference.

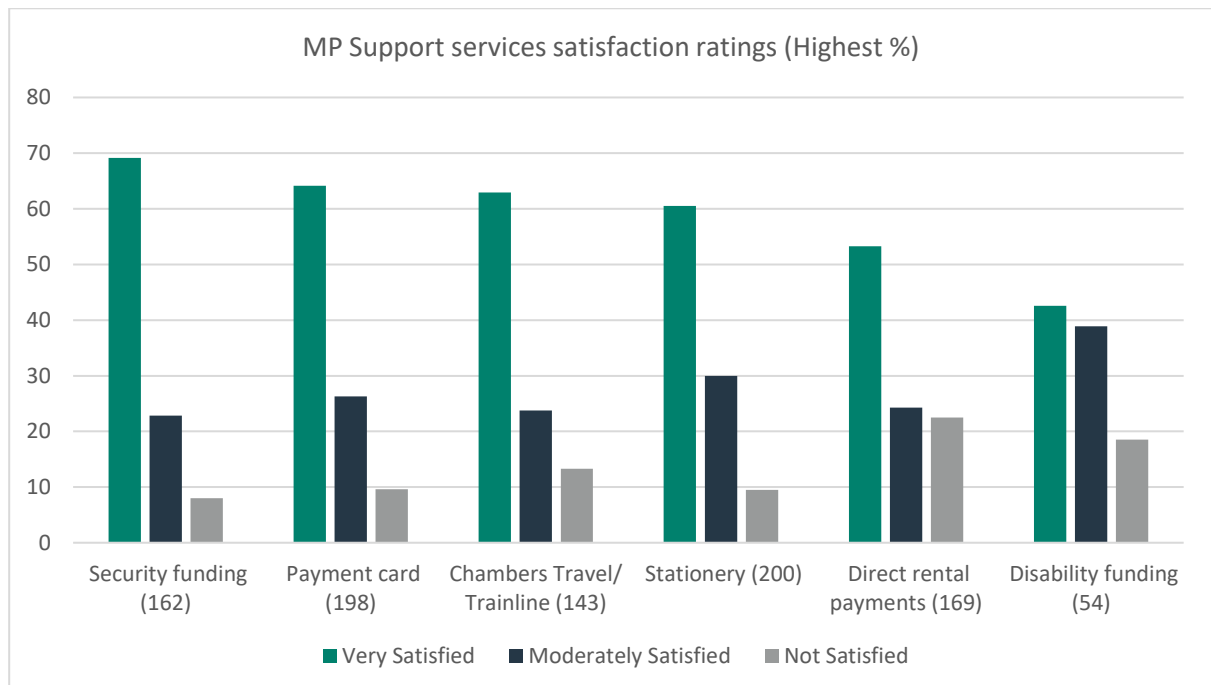
Survey Findings In Detail

Satisfaction with individual services

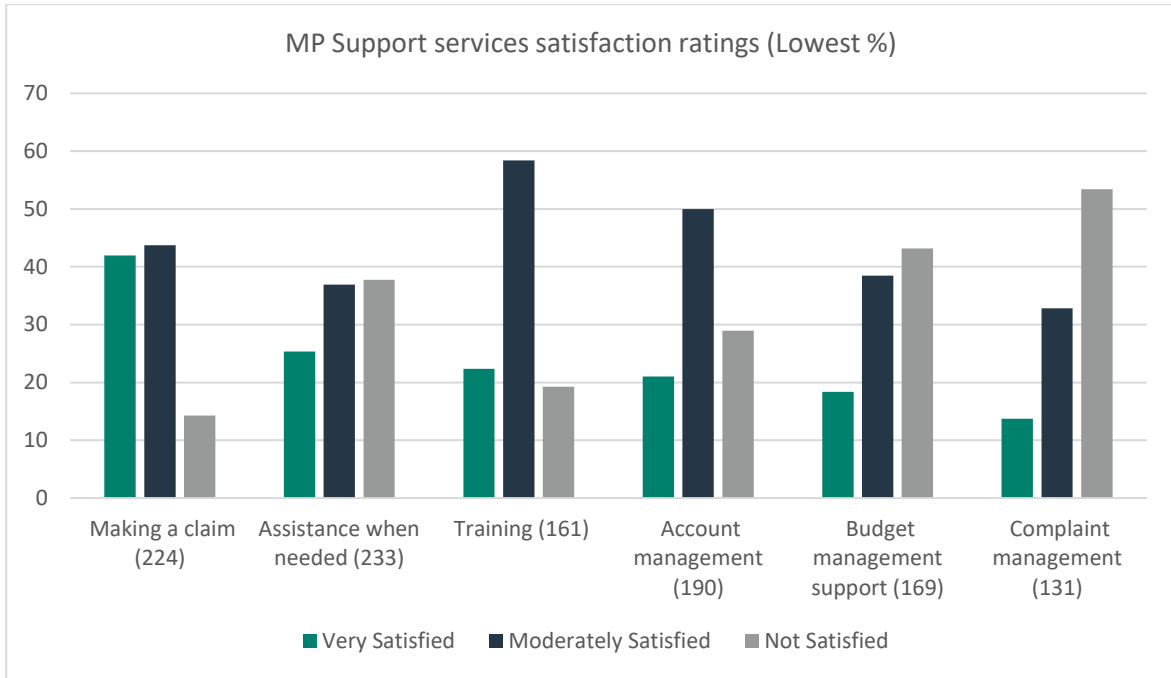
18. The survey also asked respondents about how satisfied they were with particular services that IPSA delivers. These questions covered MP Support services, payroll services and communication. As well as asking about satisfaction with services, the survey also asked how important each service is. By deducting the score for importance from the score for satisfaction, a 'Service Gap' can be calculated for each respondent.
19. In addition to these quantitative questions the survey also invited respondents to provide comments, so that we can get a better understanding of what the issues are with services, how we can improve them and what additional services users want to see.

Satisfaction Ratings:

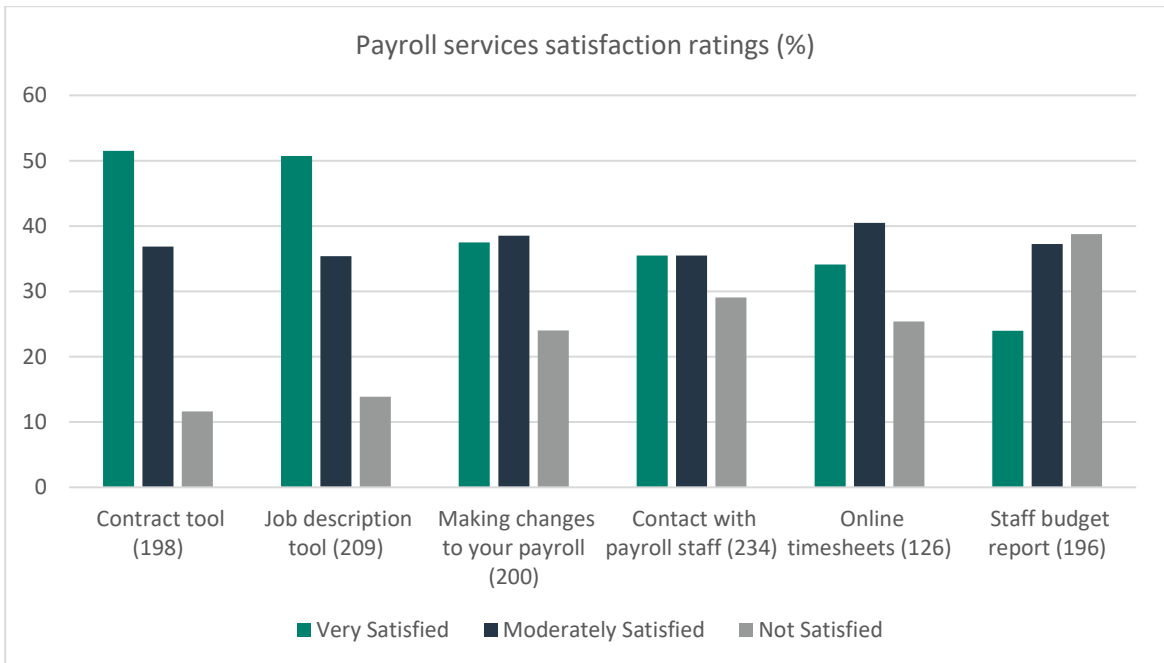
20. MP Support services cover most of IPSA's front-facing services including the initial point of contact for MPs and staff. The two graphs below show the MP Support services with the highest satisfaction ratings and those with the lowest satisfaction ratings. Among the services with low satisfaction ratings and higher numbers of respondents not satisfied were key customer facing services such as: account management; assistance when needed; and budget management support. The figures given in brackets are the overall number of respondents for each service.



Survey Findings In Detail

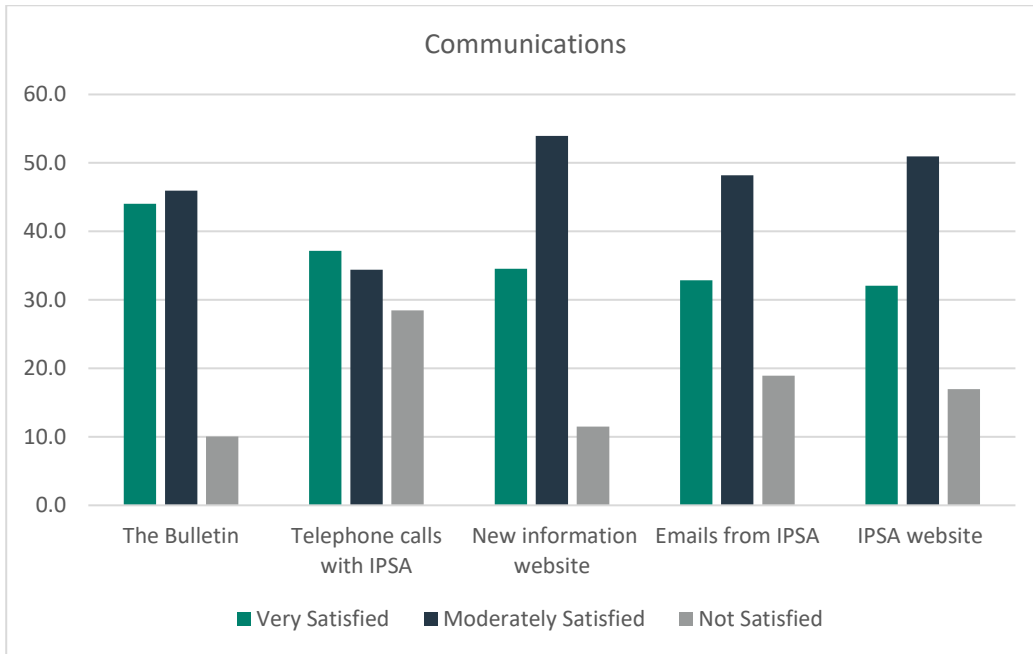


21. A similar set of questions were asked about payroll services. Out of the payroll services asked about, the contract tool and the job description tool had higher levels of satisfaction. In contrast, large numbers of responses were not satisfied with making changes to payroll, contact with payroll staff members, online timesheets and staff budget reports. As before, the figures given in brackets show the overall number of respondents expressing satisfaction ratings for each service.



Survey Findings In Detail

22. Looking at how well IPSA communicates with users, highest satisfaction ratings were received for the Bulletin and the new information website. The lowest satisfaction ratings related to telephone calls with IPSA which is likely to partly reflect that during the year, service users could not call the IPSA telephone helpline without making a booking.



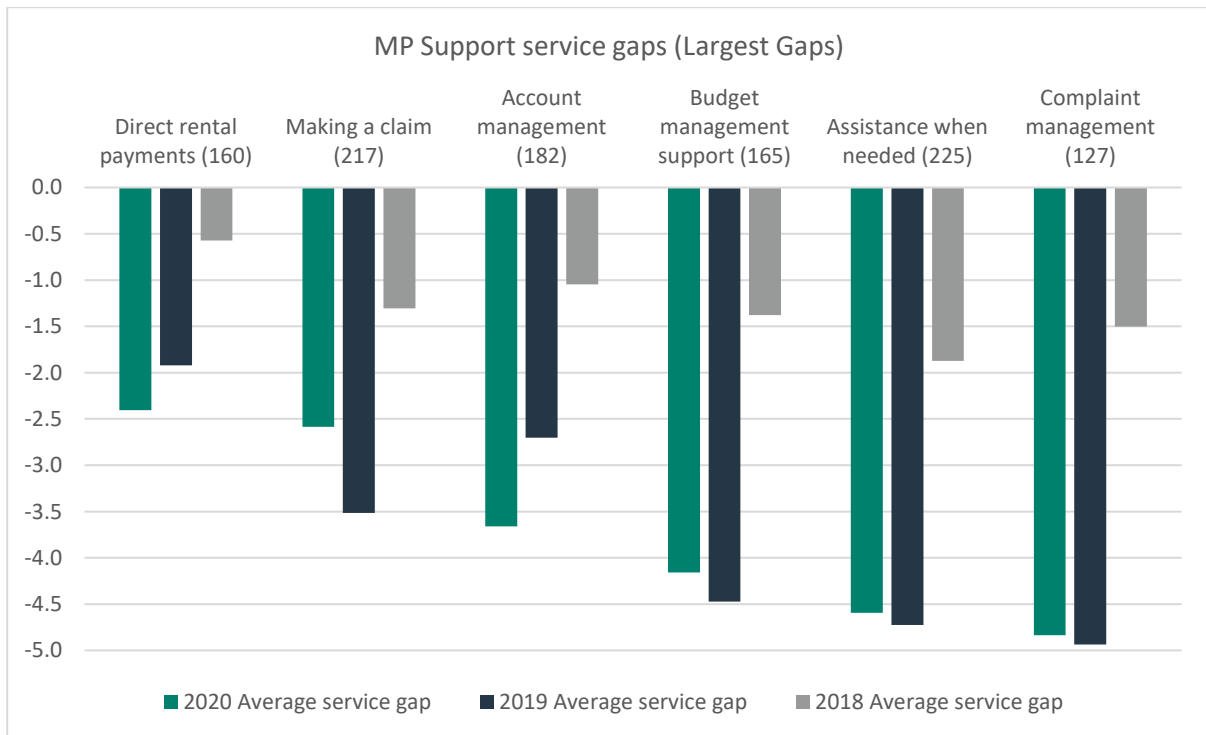
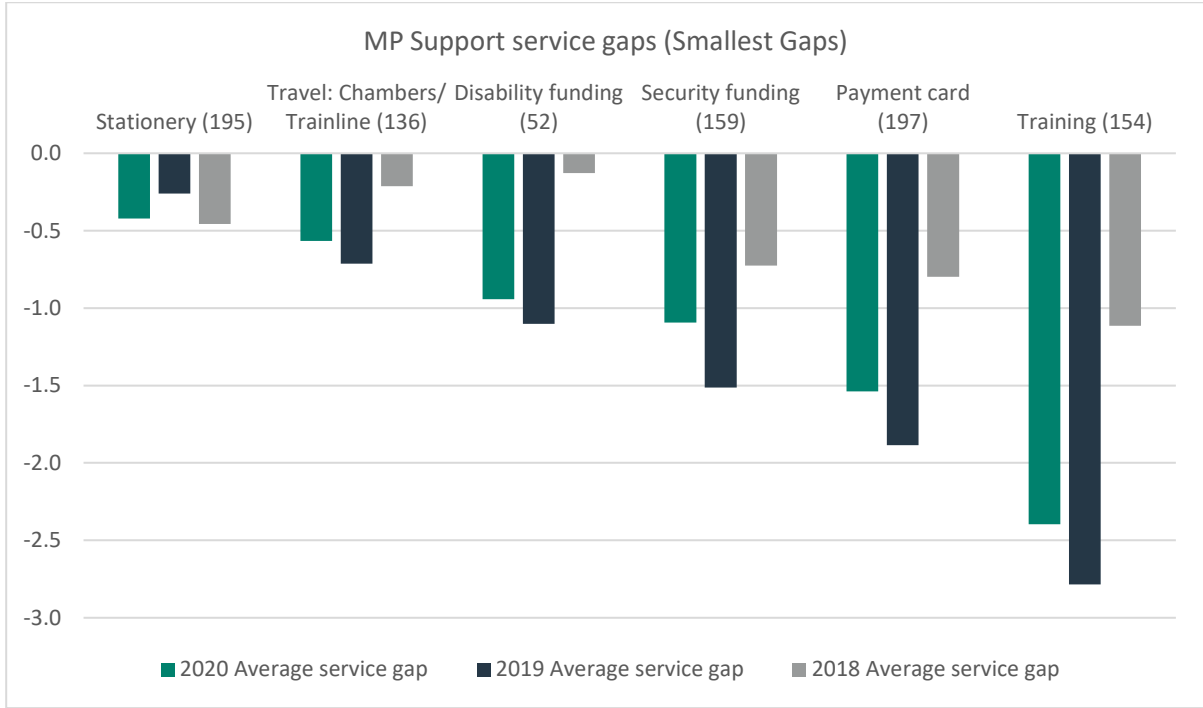
Service Gaps

23. The 'service gaps' for MP Support, payroll and communications services are calculated by subtracting a respondent's importance score for a service from the respondent's satisfaction score. For instance, if a respondent gave the Bulletin a satisfaction rating of seven, and an importance rating of nine, the service gap for the Bulletin for that respondent would be minus two. Because the service gaps are partly based on satisfaction ratings, the service gaps for each service closely mirror the satisfaction ratings. For purposes of comparison, the graphs also include the service gap figures for 2019 and 2018.

24. For MP Support services: account management; complaint management; budget management support; and getting help when needed all had the largest service gaps. In general, the service gap for most services has improved slightly since last year, but the gap is significantly wider than in 2018. The first graph below shows the MP Support services with the smallest service gaps in 2020 and the second shows those with the widest service gaps.

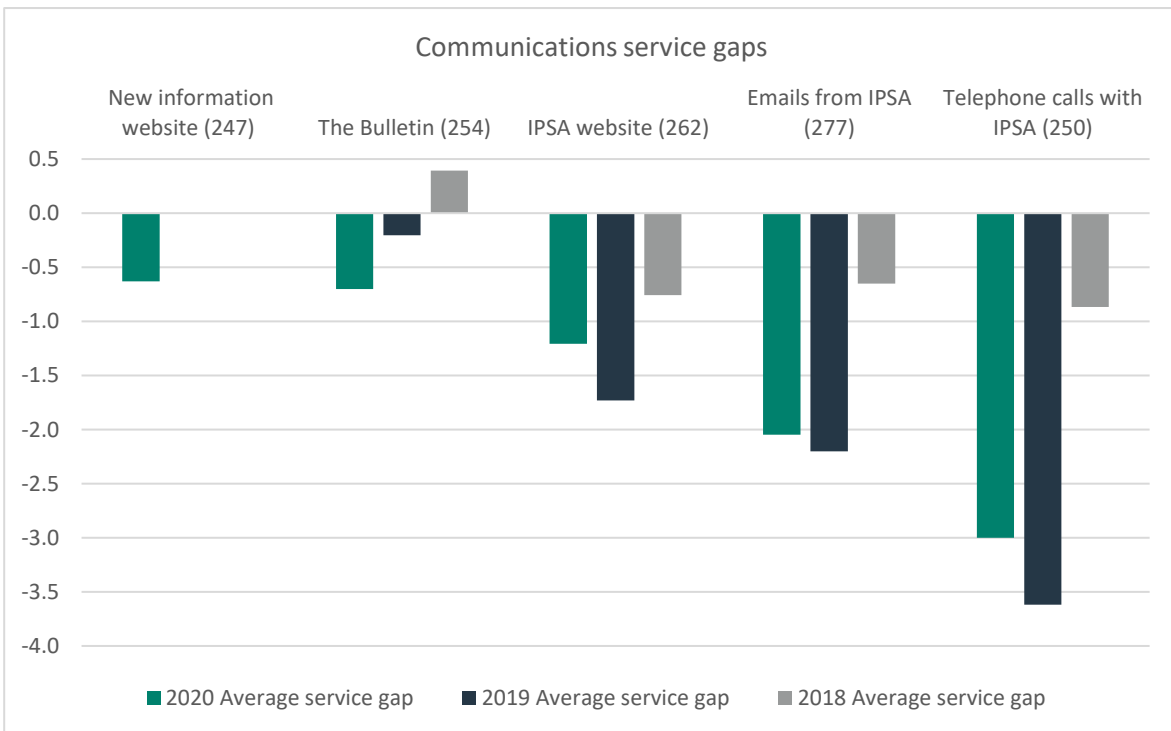
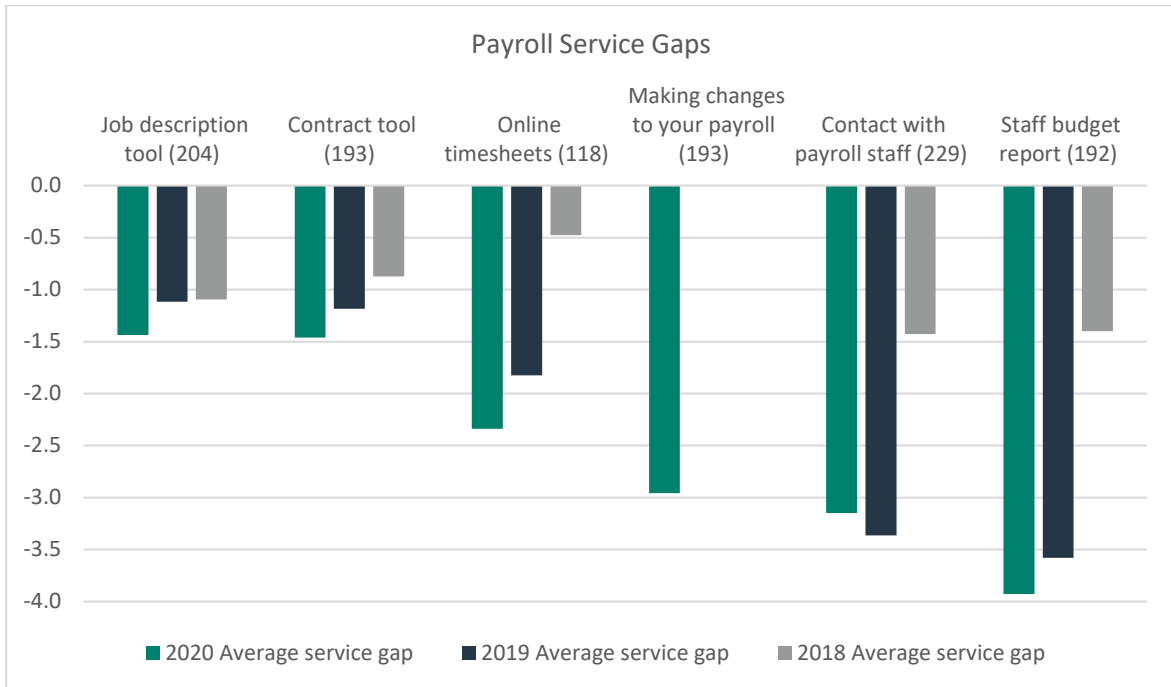
Survey Findings In Detail

Because service gaps are only calculated where a respondent gives details of both importance of and satisfaction with a service, the figures in brackets showing the sample size for service gaps are slightly lower than the figures for satisfaction ratings.



Survey Findings In Detail

25. For payroll services, the highest service gaps were: making changes to payroll; contact with payroll staff members; and staff budget reports. Service gaps were generally slightly wider than last year and significantly wider than in 2018. Service gaps for communications are in the second graph.



Survey Findings In Detail

Survey comments:

26. In addition to the importance and satisfaction ratings, the survey asked respondents to provide comments about MP Support, payroll communications. The comments provide additional detail and allow us to understand how and where we can improve. Findings from each of the comment questions are given below. The tables show the most frequently made comments for each question.

Most frequent comments about MP Support services:

What additional MP Support services would be useful? (Count)		How can we improve the services offered by MP Support? (Count)	
Direct phone contact	13	Direct phone access	23
Account manager/Single point of contact	8	Direct/easy/prompt contact & response	20
Bacs/Direct Debit payment service	7	Improved budget reporting	15
Better clarity of budgets/budget reporting	5	Account manager / Single point of contact	13
Additional payment card for office	4	Accuracy of information/advice	12
Staff able to answer queries fully	4	Staff equipped to solve problems first time	4
Budget management support	3	Accurate budget information	3
Easy to use HR functions (eg. sickness, leave)	3	Disability support / funding	3
Information on spend/payment card payments	3	Respond to all enquiries	3
		Second payment card	3
Total responses	81	Total responses	136

Survey Findings In Detail

Most frequent comments about Payroll Services

What additional Payroll Services would be useful? (Count)		How can we improve the services offered by Payroll? (Count)	
Better budget & forecasting tools	13	Accuracy of information and advice	10
Clearer & more payroll information	6	Prompt Responses to queries	8
Improved contracts/job descriptions	4	Easier/more useful reports	7
Telephone system	4	Telephone Access	6
Ability to tailor job descriptions	2	Fix IT glitches	5
Confirmation that tasks actioned/progressed	2	Improve job description tool	5
COVID staff budget report	2	Account manager/Payroll officer	4
Easier to use payroll functions	2	Covid staff budget information	4
Understanding of all services available	2	More notifications, confirm changes & updates	4
		Provide more detailed explanations to queries	4
Total responses	81	Total responses	136

Most frequent comments about Communications

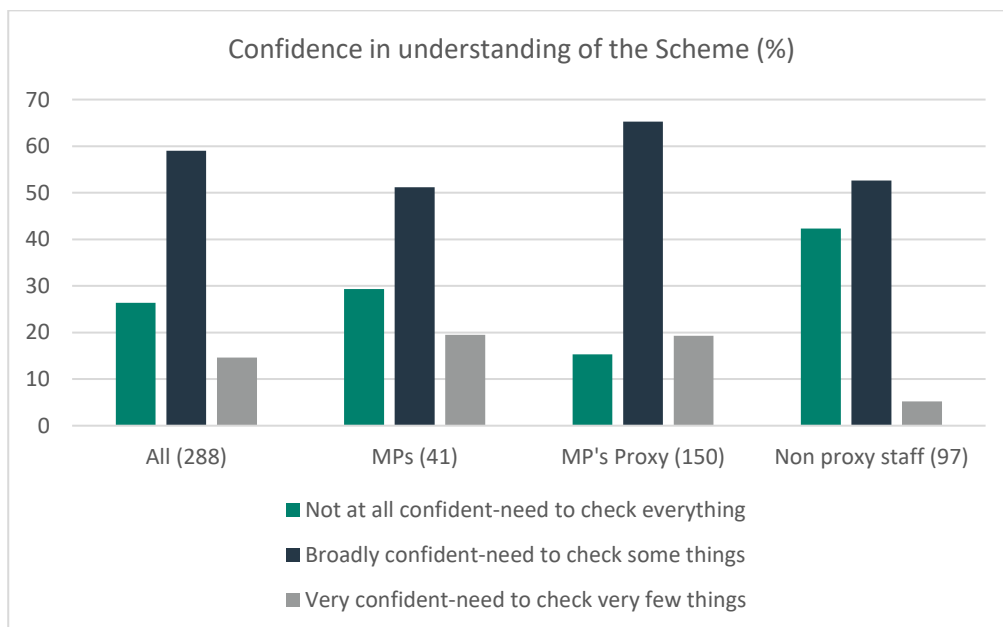
How can we better communicate with you? (Count)	
Telephone Access	20
Faster response to queries	15
Direct contact with account manager	8
Accurate & comprehensive advice first time	6
Fast response to urgent queries	5

Survey Findings In Detail

Account manager	4
Ease of contact	4
Highlight important information	4
Reduce newsletter content	4
Separate emails for important information	4
Website navigation & search function	4

Claims & Expenses

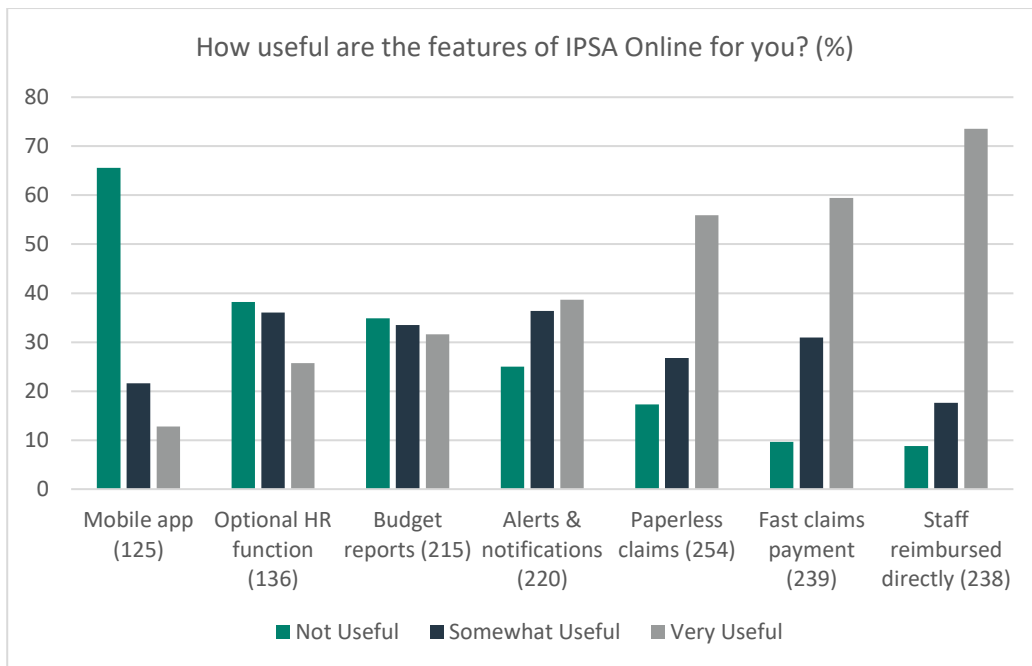
27. One of the main responsibilities of IPSA is to regulate MPs business costs and expenses. A central part of this relates to the overseeing of claims submitted by MPs' offices. When asked about their understanding of the scheme, 73.6% of respondents stated that they were either broadly confident or very confident in their understanding of the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses. This ranged from 84.6% of MPs' proxies to 57.8% of non proxy staff. Perhaps the most noteworthy finding for the claims process was that 61.1% of respondents who had recently had a claim returned to them stated that the explanatory notes were not clear.



Survey Findings In Detail

IPSA Online

28. IPSA Online is the online system that MPs and staff use to submit and manage claims. It is also a payroll and finance system. Offices can use it to run budget reports that show office and staff costs. They can also use it for HR functions such as logging of annual leave and staff absence. The graph below shows how useful offices found various IPSA Online services. Features like direct payment of claims, faster payment of claims and staff members being reimbursed directly were rated most useful. Some of the other features such as budget reports, alerts and notifications and HR functions were rated least useful.



29. These findings broadly reflect the comments received about IPSA Online which can be seen in the table below. In addition, the comments found IPSA Online a difficult and clunky system to navigate. Also there was a wish for more suitable and user friendly reporting functionality.

Survey Findings In Detail

IPSA Online comments:

What one improvement to IPSA Online would make the biggest difference to you? (Count)	
Improve user interface / IT	40
More user-friendly / better reporting	30
Provide notifications / alerts	15
Easier access to payroll info / payslips	13
Visibility of different budgets and past and forecast spend	11
Phoneline	10
Ensure budget data accurate / up-to-date	9
Clear explanation of rejected claims	6
Total responses	217

Learning and Development

30. Having in place a high quality learning and development programme is important to ensure that users understand IPSA's policies and processes and how to use IPSA Online to its full extent. Overall, 45% of respondents reported that they would like to receive learning and development support for IPSA tasks. When asked what was the preferred method of learning, the most popular way was to make contact by email or phone as or when the need arises with 68.4% of respondents expressing a strong preference for this method. This was followed by 51.3% of respondents expressing a preference for a mix of training approaches.

Survey Findings In Detail



31. When asked what additional learning and development support we could provide, there was a range of different answers, but additional training on budget management and running reports featured prominently. There was also a wish for refresher training and training on new developments, as well as induction training for new staff.