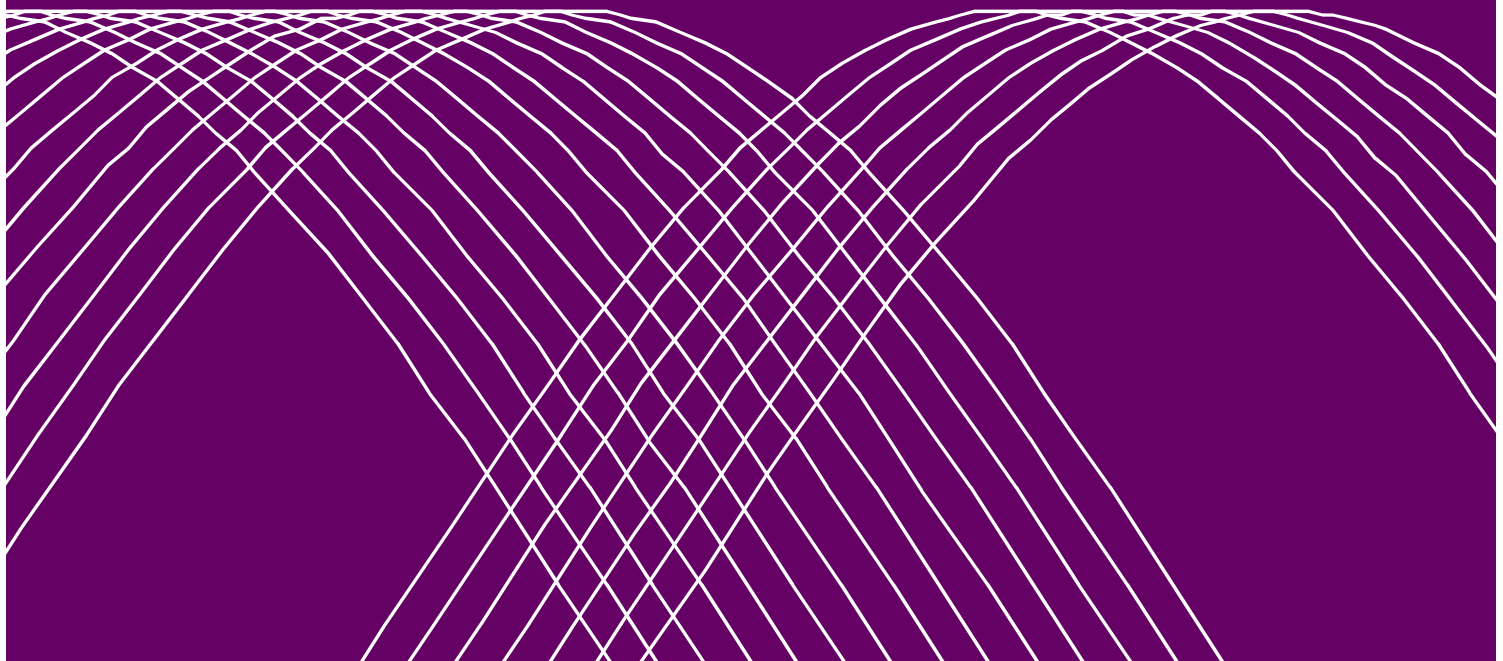




# **OPSR Principles of Customer Feedback & Ideal Framework for research in Public Services**

Revised July 2004



## The policy context

*'We must be bold on reform, opening up public services to a greater diversity of supply, consumer choice and flexibility of working, ending the 'one size fits all' idea of the past'*

**(Prime Minister, New Year message 2003)**

***'Reform is not the enemy of social justice and educational advance, but the route to it'***

**(Prime Minister, November 2002)**

These two statements encapsulate and reformulate the underpinnings of public service ethos in new ways. For many years, people designing and delivering public services have been motivated by the desire to serve. The task now is to channel that motivation in new directions which are attuned very closely to the wishes of diverse groups and individuals.

Ending 'one size fits all' is an enormous challenge which involves fundamental changes in the way public services are conceptualised and managed. Historically, we have designed services based largely on providers' understanding of best practice. If we are to provide services which are appropriate to the current policy context, we need to base our understanding of the work we do much more fundamentally in our understanding of what our customers want and expect than we have done previously.

Unless we know what our customers' want, we have no alternative than to make assumptions and design services based on a combination expert knowledge and experience of delivery and guess work about the way our customers will respond. This is not sufficient. We need principles to guide the way we collect data.

### **COLLECTING CUSTOMER DATA – A FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS**

OPSR have established 7 principles of customer feedback:

#### **(1) We should listen and respond to customers.**

By customers we mean the ultimate intended beneficiary; the people who use the service. In some cases there may be more than one customer group, for example both parents and children can be defined as customers of primary schools.

As a minimum, a customer survey should include:

#### **An overall rating**

- Frequently a single measure of overall customer satisfaction, although other overall rating questions may be appropriate.

### **Ratings of specific aspects of service delivery**

- Service attributes will include measures of delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude, which have been found to be generic drivers of satisfaction. Further service attributes will depend on the service provided.
- These rating questions are used in key driver analysis to derive which aspects of service delivery have greatest impact on a positive customer experience (see (5) below)

### **Customer expectations**

- What do customers expect of the service provided? By asking respondents to relate their actual experience of services in conjunction with their levels of satisfaction, we can derive what level of service standard is acceptable to customers.

### **(2) At the local level**

Data needs to be collected at the local level. For data to be actionable, we need to be able to understand the customer experience at the relevant local management unit, such as individual school, college, basic command unit, hospital etc.

Data should be collected consistently by individual local management unit so that results can be compared between peers.

### **(3) Ensuring national comparability**

Being able to make comparisons in a national context between different geographies, demographic groups, providers or management units of similar services is crucial to establishing and maintaining standards and accountability. Data needs to be collected locally in such a way that it can be aggregated to give the national picture.

### **(4) Segmenting customers**

As customers are not a homogenous group, it is important to be able to analyse customer survey data by different customer group. Customer segmentation needs to reflect the true spectrum of customer groups that are served rather than the current internal structures of service deliverers. Customer segmentation will differ from service to service; some examples of ways in which customers can be segmented include:

- **Demography**
- **Geography**
- **Frequency of service use**
- **Motivation for service use**
- **Customer type**

### **(5) Seeking to understand the factors, which drive satisfaction**

We need to know which factors have greatest impact on customers' overall experience. To do this, we need to

- Ask an overall rating question
- Ask rating questions of all aspects of service delivery (see 1 above)
- Carry out secondary statistical analyses to derive the key drivers

## (6) Reliably and cost effectively

- **Methodologies consistent at the local level in terms of**
  - data collection method, questions asked, question order, sampling procedures, time of fieldwork, analysis and reporting
- **Surveys are inclusive as possible**
  - Particular effort made to include hard to reach groups
  - Techniques used to ensure as high a survey response rate as possible and analysis carried out among to understand impact of possible non-response biases
- **Cost benefit analysis carried out**
  - At what point does increased survey cost outweigh further improvements to data quality?

## (7) Over time

Methodologies need to be consistent over time to give reliable trend data.

The decision on how regularly to survey customers is a trade-off between the need for frequent performance data which reflect actual change in the customer experience and the financial and administrative burdens.

Many surveys are carried out twice a year or more frequently, and increasingly customer research is carried out continuously throughout the year, with quarterly reporting of data.

## Conclusion

Customer satisfaction data is gathered in many different ways in public services. In order for it to be useful, all the above principles should be applied simultaneously in combination or we risk basing our service provision on assumption and provider expertise as we have in the past. It is only on the basis of excellent data that we can move forward to respond to the new policy context.