



October 2012

Key Findings
from the
Annual Survey
of MPs
2012

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the first Annual Survey of MPs, which was conducted by IPSA during June and July 2012.

The survey was carried out online for a period of three weeks. 14 questions asked MPs their views on:

- the guidance we provide;
- the changes introduced for paying business costs and expenses;
- their experience of completing claims; and
- IPSA's processing of claims.

In 2011, the National Audit Office (NAO) carried out a survey of all MPs, asking them about IPSA and its work. This survey builds on the work undertaken by the NAO.

Where appropriate, questions from the NAO survey were retained, enabling us to make direct comparisons and to measure our progress.

Responses were received from 128 MPs. Quantitative analysis was carried out on 14 fixed questions and qualitative analysis on 8 free text fields used to collect additional views on questions.

This report includes: the key findings, by theme; a full list of recommendations made by MPs; a note on data protection; details of how the survey was conducted; and the full survey data.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Summary

- 1.1. The 2012 survey results show an encouraging improvement in MPs' perception of IPSA and its administration. In particular, MPs reported considerably higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of advice provided:
 - (a) Around three-quarters find advice on phones useful and are satisfied with guidance;
 - (b) Around two-thirds say emails are useful, and think the system improvements help;
 - (c) Half are spending less time making claims.
- 1.2. However, a significant number of MPs commented about the time they spend making claims, the complexity of the system and the speed of processing of claims by IPSA.
- 1.3. MPs continue to report that they are not claiming for business costs and expenses to which they believe they are entitled.
- 1.4. While there has been a rise in the use of direct payment methods, there appears to be a difference between awareness of the options available and their use.
- 1.5. The findings of the survey, by theme, are reported below.

2. Advice and guidance from IPSA

- 2.1. The survey results reveal improved satisfaction levels in relation to all advice given via various channels when MPs contact IPSA and the guidance that we have produced to the Scheme and the expenses system.

Advice

- 2.2. 75% of those who responded (see *Chart 1*) find advice provided by phone either 'very' or 'fairly' useful, up from 49% in 2011.
- 2.3. 64% of respondents find written advice (emails/letters) 'very' or 'fairly' useful, compared to 40% in 2011.
- 2.4. 80% find face to face communication very or fairly useful, up from 62% in 2011.

Chart 1
Usefulness of advice when contacting IPSA, in the last six months

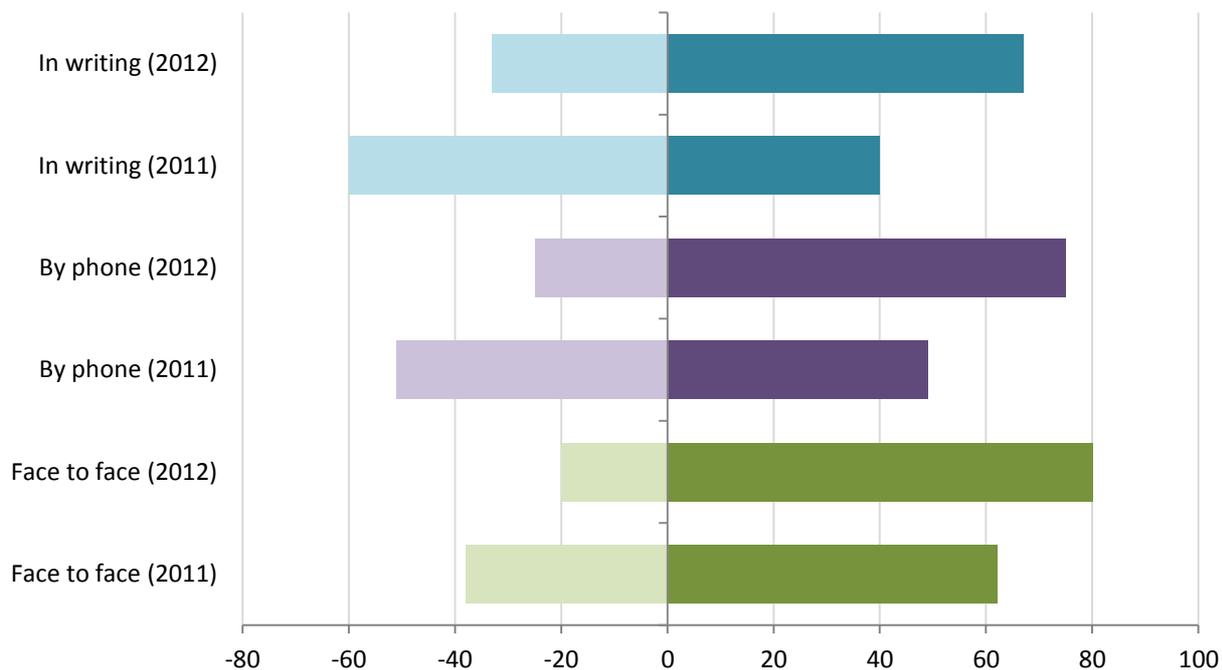
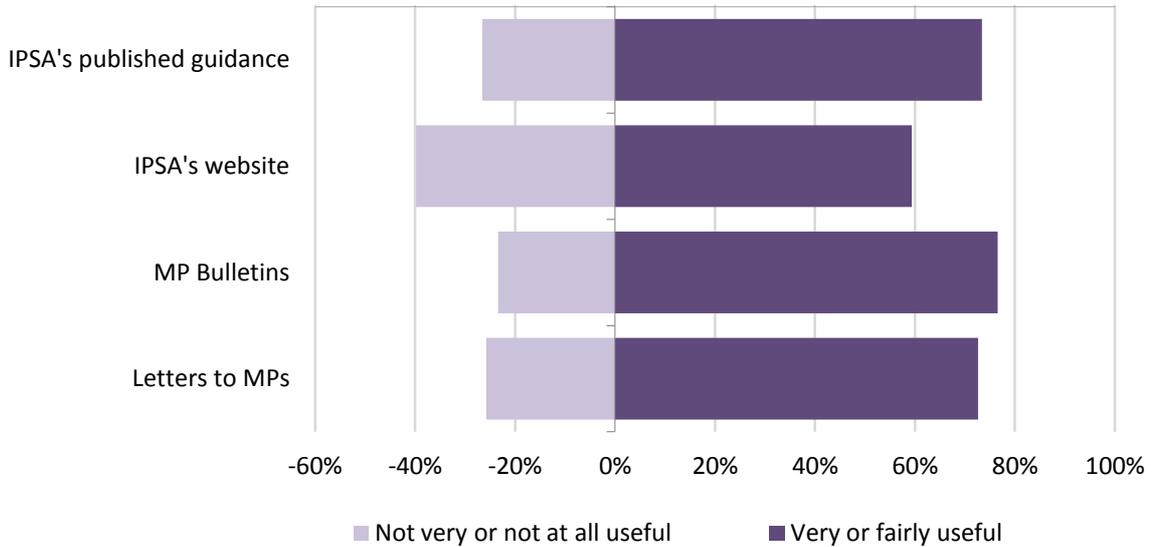


Chart 1. Faded bars represent the number of MPs who responded with 'not very' or 'not at all' useful. Solid bars represent the 'very' or 'fairly' useful responses.

Guidance

- 2.5. 73% of MPs find the guidance on the Scheme 'very' or 'fairly' useful (see *Chart 2*), compared to 39% in 2011.
- 2.6. The bulletins are also well received. 77% of respondents find them 'very' or 'fairly' useful. However, there were a number of comments that the bulletins mix news about changes and general information, thereby limiting their impact. Some also remarked that with all the correspondence that MPs receive, the bulletins simply do not get read.
- 2.7. IPSA's main website was less well received, with only 59% of respondents finding it useful, and a number of negative comments about its layout.
- 2.8. In the free text responses, there was a general concern that MPs were not able to keep up with all the changes to the system.
- 2.9. There was also a call from a number of MPs for more personalised guidance, preferably in person or by telephone and for longer opening hours for the telephone support team. A minority of MPs stated that they had received poor or inconsistent advice.

Chart 2
Usefulness of guidance on the rules and expenses system



Speed of response to queries

2.10. MPs' views on the speed of response when contacting IPSA remains mixed. The percentage reporting that they are satisfied with the rate of response has risen, but there remains a relatively high level of dissatisfaction.

2.11. For contact in writing or by email (see *Chart 3*), 46% are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the speed of response, compared to just 17% in 2011.

2.12. For contact by telephone (see *Chart 4*), 47% of MPs are 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied, compared to 26% in 2011.

2.13. However, 40% of MPs polled remain 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied with the speed of response for contact in writing or by email, and 35% for contact by phone. Some of the free text responses were very insistent on this point.

Chart 3
Speed of response given in writing

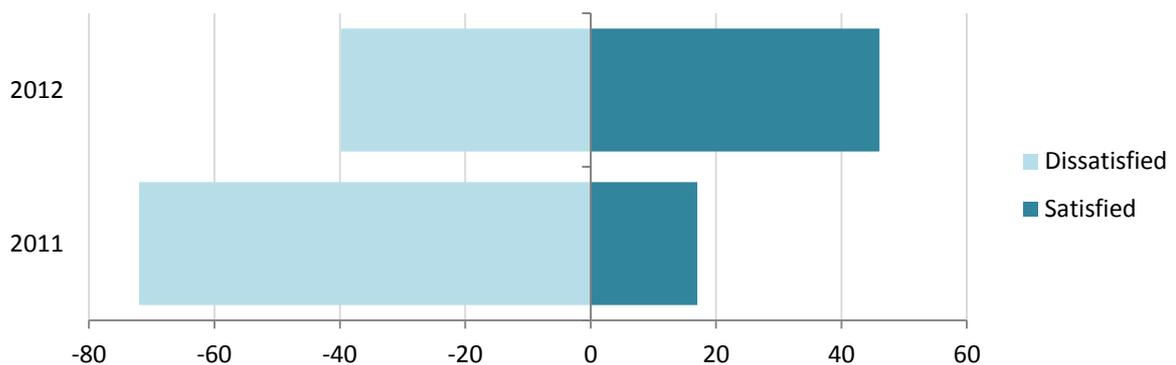
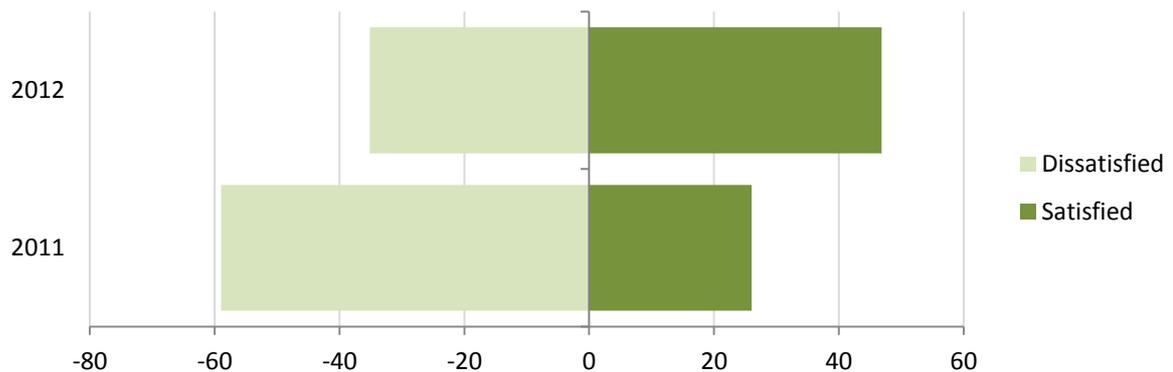


Chart 4
Speed of response given by phone



Sample of comments

2.14. "I just tend to pay more attention to MPs Bulletins and find them helpful. Letters to MPs instinctively I think "EEK this is bad news" and put off reading it properly."

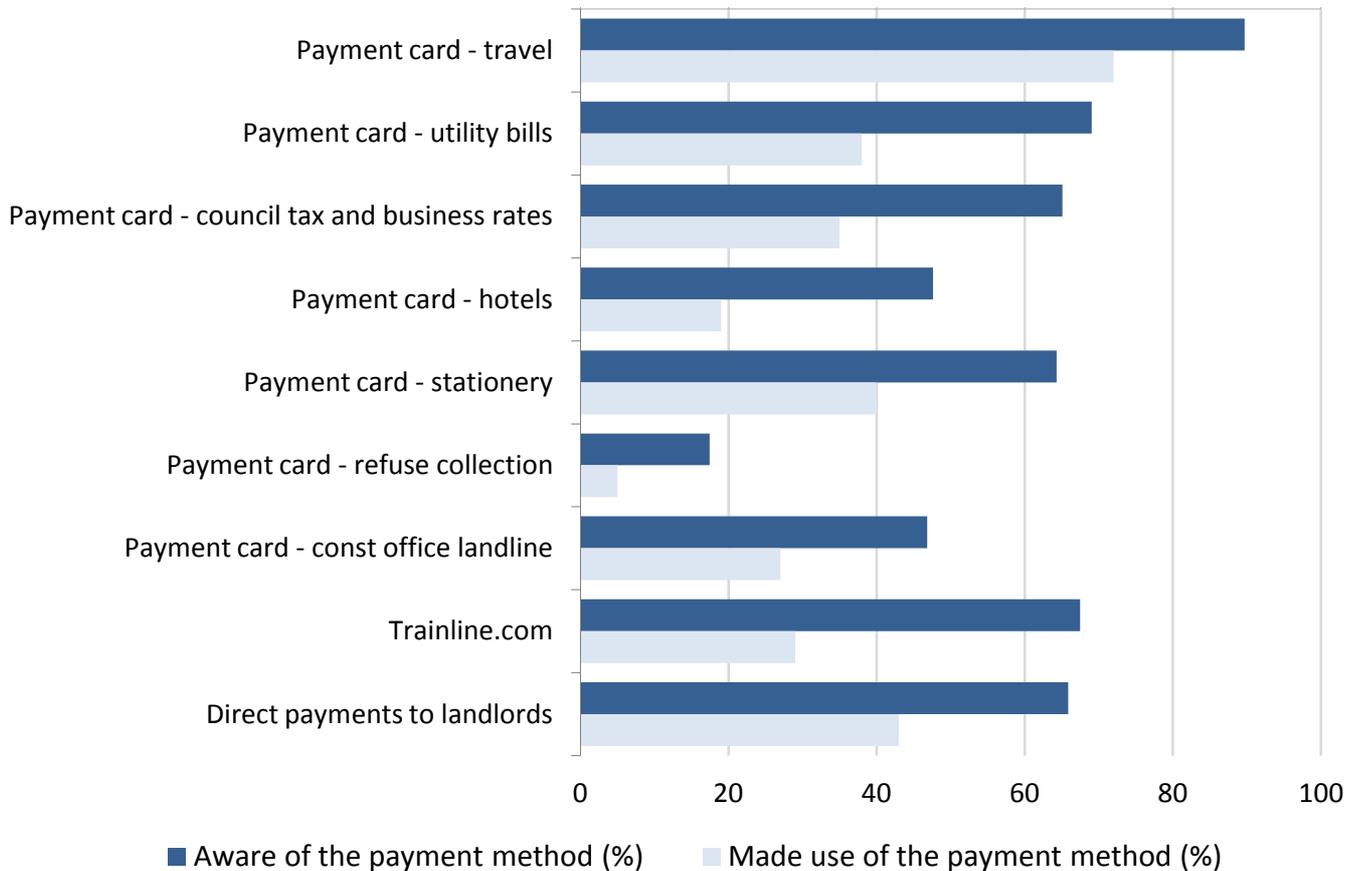
2.15. "Hard to keep up with the changes yet vital that we do."

2.16. "The problem is that the advice and guidance keeps on changing and it's so easy to miss important changes in the flurry of communications we get from IPSA. What we really need is for changes to be made less often and to be better signaled when they are - and for the phone lines to be open all day, not just in the afternoons, precisely when most MPs are at their busiest."

2.17. "It [the system] has improved greatly - well done! My only significant criticism is that sending an email to IPSA still feels like sending it into a black hole. I rarely get any reply at all and if I do it is usually far too late to be of any help and the moment has passed. The old Commons system usually produced an email response the next day (or the one after at most) and I think IPSA should set a target response time - and publish it (and keep to it)."

3. Payment cards and direct payment

3.1. 48% of MPs said that either they did not know about some or any of the direct payment options listed in the survey or they did know but required further help. In contrast, 40% of MPs said that they did know about the payment options and were using all the options suitable to them.

Chart 5**Awareness and uptake of payment methods**

3.2. The survey results also reveal a significant variation in the reported uptake of different payment options:

- (a) 72% of MPs reported that they had used the payment card for travel; whereas
- (b) Only 43% of MPs reported using direct payments to landlords for accommodation or office rent.

3.3. On average, across all the payment options, there is a 22% lag between awareness and use. That is to say for any given option, on average, 22% of MPs will be aware of it but not using it. This is most pronounced for the use of the Trainline system for booking travel, where 67% of respondents were aware of the service but only 29% have used it. See *Chart 5* for a comparison between awareness and uptake of direct payment methods.

3.4. 13% of MPs said that they had not used any of the payment options listed.

3.5. Only 7% of MPs said that they were not aware of any of the payment options listed.

3.6. 40% of the free text responses (12 out of 30) were in favour of an expansion of the scope of direct payments in some way. Many MPs feel uncomfortable about using their own personal accounts initially to pay for expenses or business costs.

Sample of Comments

3.7. “The payment card should be able to be used for ALL business-related outlays where the funds are subsequently able/approved to be reclaimed from MP budgets. It is very frustrating to know that personal funds have to be relied upon initially for various outlays, which is a situation that is practically unheard of in professional institutions. It is also very confusing when trying to manage personal finances and reconcile bank accounts.”

4. Using the System

4.1. The survey results suggest a lessening of the burden perceived by MPs when it comes to submitting claims (see *Chart 6*): 50% of MPs said that, since October 2011, they were spending less time claiming for business costs and expenses.

4.2. MPs were also asked to estimate the amount of hours they and their staff spend claiming business costs and expenses.

Chart 6

Time spent, since October 2011, by MPs and their staff claiming business costs and expenses

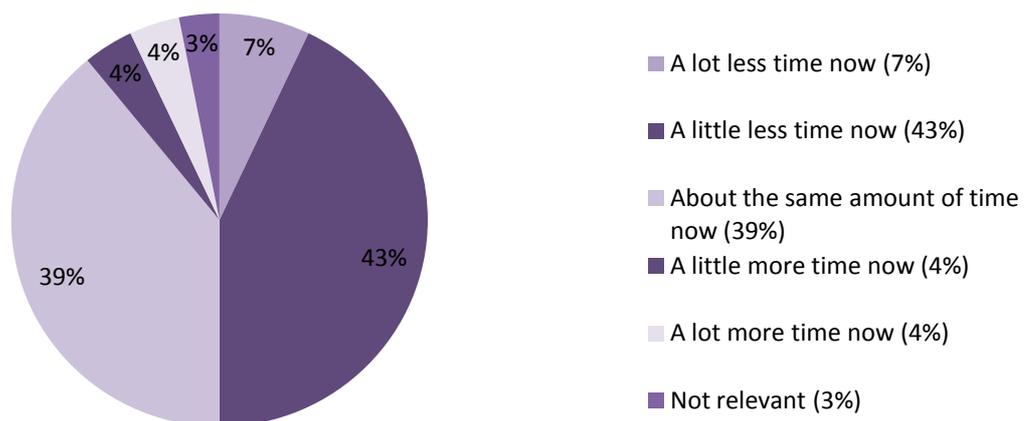
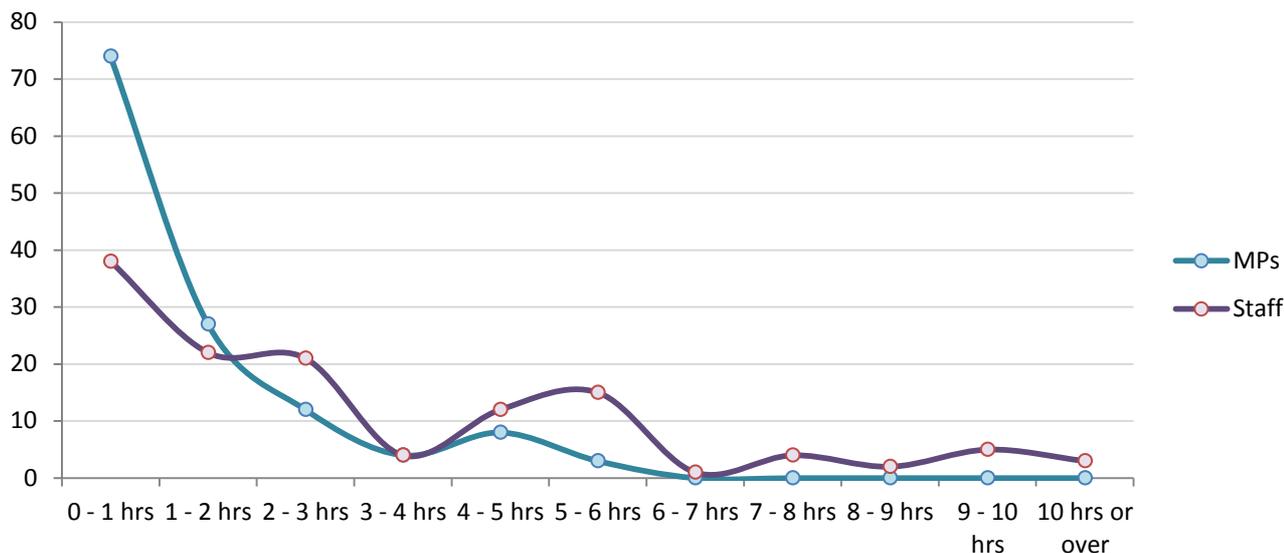


Chart 7**Distribution chart of responses to hours spent per week by MPs and their staff claiming business costs and expenses**

4.3. MPs reported spending, on average (mean), 1.6 hours per week, and their staff 3.5 hours per week, claiming business costs and expenses. *Chart 7* shows the distribution of responses to this question and the notable difference between the reported time spent by MPs and their staff.

- (a) 79% of MPs said that they were spending between 0 and 2 hours per week making claims;
- (b) Out of those MPs, almost a quarter (24%) said that they spent no time per week making claims;
- (c) 47% of MPs said that their staff were spending between 0 and 2 hours per week making claims;
- (d) However, 20% reported that their staff members are spending between 2 and 4 hours, 21% reported between 4 and 6 hours and 12% reported that their staff members are spending between 6 and 10 hours or over making claims.

4.4. 61% said that the changes made to the expenses system in the last twelve months made it 'easier' or 'much easier' to complete claims.

4.5. However, almost all comments expressed the view that the system is too time-consuming, complex and restrictive, and some MPs continued to report that because of this, their ability to do their job is impaired.

4.6. When asked what aspect of submitting claims takes the most time, 41% (35 out of 85) mentioned the online inputting of

claims. The physical process of printing and filling out forms and photocopying receipts was also mentioned by many, along with the nature of the claim forms which were often said to be repetitive and overly demanding in detail, particularly for small claims.

4.7. 8% (7 out of 85) of MPs' comments were specifically concerned with reconciliation of the payment card and that the process is time consuming and difficult to complete.

4.8. A minority (3 out of 44) requested a return to a paper-based system.

Sample of Comments

4.9. "The process of submitting claims has been much improved in the last 12 months and it is not a particularly time consuming exercise at this point"

4.10. "The on-line system still seems "clunky", for example it takes several clicks between opting to print a form and it actually happening. My staff tell me they dread IPSA time coming round because they start with a feeling that it will be unnecessarily time-consuming to operate the on-line forms."

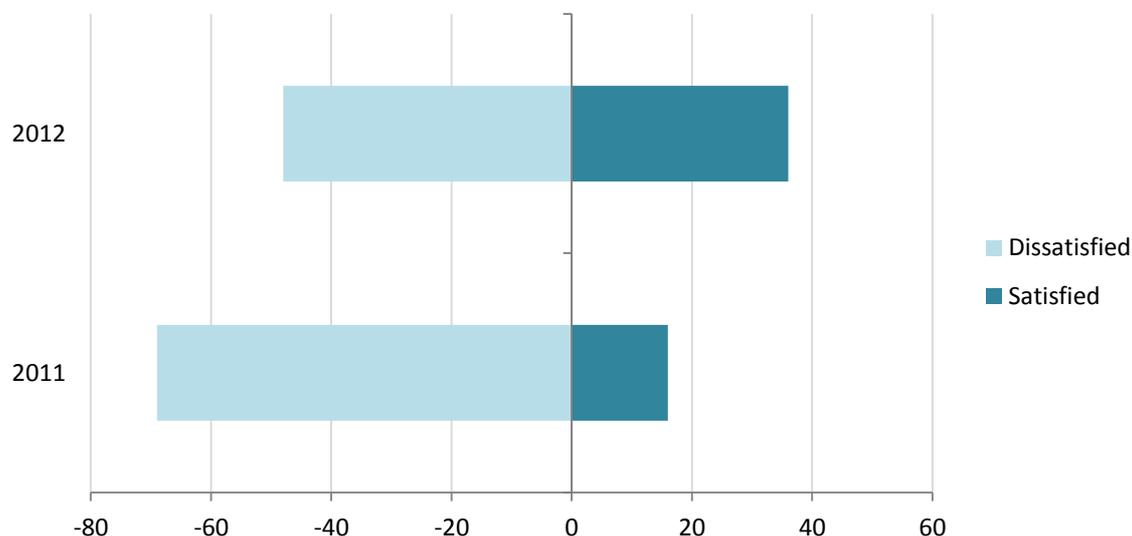
5. Processing of claims by IPSA

Speed

5.1. The survey shows that MPs remain dissatisfied with the speed of processing by IPSA. However, there has been a significant improvement in satisfaction levels since 2011 (see *Chart 8*):

- (a) 48% are 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied, compared to 69% in 2011;
- (b) 36% are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied, compared to only 16% in 2011.

5.2. Furthermore, when asked about how IPSA could improve the service it provides in relation to expenses claims, 46% of MPs (27 out of 59) called for faster processing of claims.

Chart 8**Comparison of MPs' perception of speed of processing between 2011 and 2012***Queries about claims*

5.3. MPs noted an improvement in the handling of IPSA's queries about claims.

- (a) 47% of MPs said that they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied, compared with 18% in 2011;
- (b) 26% of MPs said that they were either 'fairly' or 'very' dissatisfied, compared to 63% in 2011.

5.4. A majority of MPs have a poor perception of the reasonableness of IPSA's queries about claims, with 66% of MPs saying that only some or none had been reasonable.

- (a) However, 34% of MPs said that the queries were all or most were all reasonable, which is a significant improvement on the 2011 data (15%).

5.5. When asked why they believed IPSA's queries had been unreasonable, 41% of MPs (16 out of 39) cited administrative error on the part of IPSA.

5.6. MPs also criticised repeated queries about regular claims each time they are submitted, and queries relating to 'small' mistakes or problems which they felt could have been sorted immediately by directly contacting the MP concerned.

Repayments and Accuracy

5.7. IPSA's handling of repayment requests showed one of the most marked improvements:

- (a) Only 6% of MPs are now 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied with how IPSA handles the collection of repayments, down from 43% in 2011.

5.8. There has also been a fall in dissatisfaction with the accuracy of IPSA's processing of reimbursement claims, from 19% in 2011 to 8% in 2012.

Sample of Comments

5.9. "Speed of repayment has improved significantly but still needs to do better. It is the one aspect still lagging behind the old Commons system."

5.10. "I reckon that at any one time I am subsidising IPSA by £1,000 because of negative cash flow. It is still taking 3-4 weeks to pay some claims..."

5.11. "They have verged on the pedantic. Claims have been queried due to the date written on the signed invoice. You are not notified when there is a query and the office have to chase up when the claim isn't paid and it is not clear why."

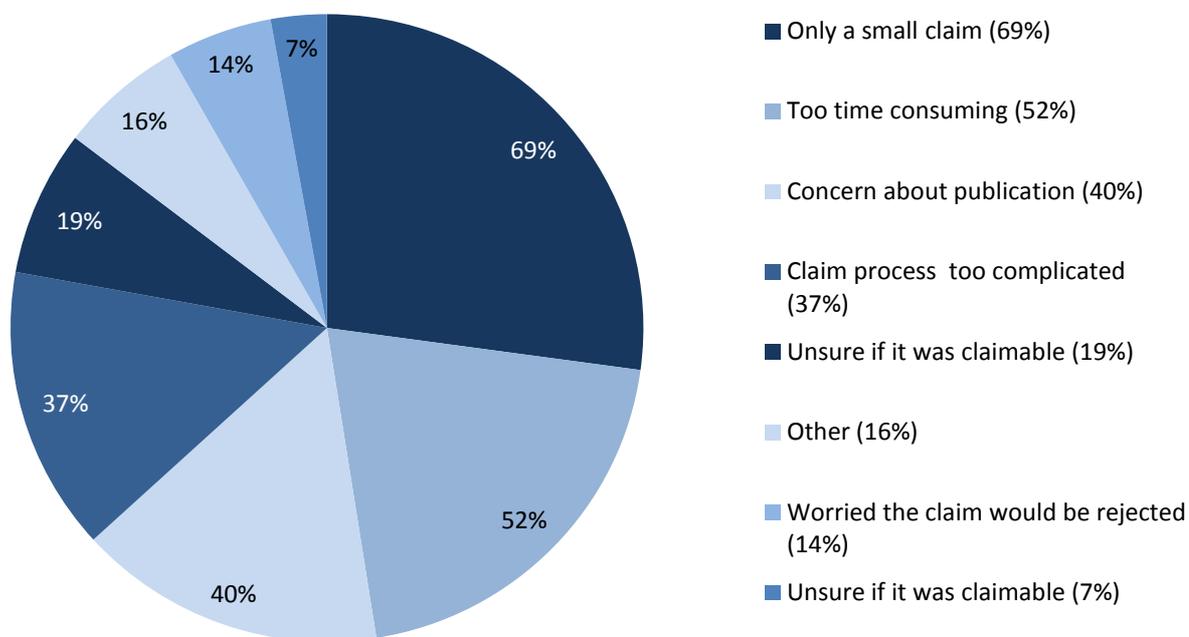
6. MPs' use of expenses

6.1. 85% of MPs said that they had decided not to claim for expenses for which they believed they could be reimbursed, and while results varied to some degree when compared to 2011, the overall message remains unchanged.

6.2. The reasons given were (see *Chart 9*):

- (a) It was only a small claim (69%; 2011 - 59%);
- (b) Concern that it would take too long (52%; 2011 - 49%);
- (c) Concern about the claim being published (40%; 2011 - 41%);
- (d) The claim process was too complicated (37%; 2011 -

Chart 9
Reasons for not claiming expenses



- 49%);
 (e) Unsure of whether it was claimable (19%; 2011 - 27%);
 (f) Concern that the claim would be rejected (12%; 2011 - 24%);
 (g) Unsure of what amount could be claimed for (6%; 2011 - 18%).

6.3. Some MPs reported that they faced personal cash flow problems (5 out of 74).

7. Further comments

7.1. The final question in the survey gave MPs the opportunity to express any comments, further to the previous questions, about IPSA's administration of the Scheme.

7.2. 40% of MPs (20 out of 50) reiterated that the system was too complex and time consuming and that the processing of claims was slow.

7.3. However, 30% of MPs who commented (15 out of 50) noted an improvement/satisfaction with the system or made

positive comments about frontline staff.

- 7.4. Nevertheless, those who commented still generally have a negative view of IPSA, seeing it as arbitrary, lacking understanding of an MP's role and in general as something which makes their lives a lot harder.

Sample of Comments

- 7.5. "The amount of time it would have taken to obtain the receipts required from IPSA was just not realistic"

- 7.6. "I don't want to be trawled through newspapers for claiming small amounts, but IPSA insist that we do - for instance, each car parking claim has to be itemised. But in a year, a weekly small amount for sending recorded delivery items, for instance, adds up, but of course, we can't make an annual claim because of the arbitrary 90 day rule."

- 7.7. "I might have greater confidence in IPSA if I believed that its senior managers and directors actually understood what MPs spend their weeks doing and could therefore be relied upon to train their staff to provide a good quality service. So far as I am aware, IPSA's senior team have not tried work-shadowing MPs at Westminster or in constituencies. I would urge them to do so."

- 7.8. "the people who you have working in the office who deal with us on the phone are very good, in fact they are wonderful. Any time I call they are helpful, considerate and very well mannered to help through the process. I speak with them quite a lot and really think they should be thanked. The public criticism that i sometimes see in the papers about IPSA from the old guard bears absolutely no relation to my experience and i think they just grumble for the sake of it."

MPs' Recommendations

Set out below are the recommendations on improvements made by MPs. These are not weighted.

Guidance

- Improve IPSA's main website
 - General difficulty finding information (search function, placement of information and menus)
 - Forms should be much easier to find
 - Search engine for MP's bulletins
 - Most up to date information should be more visible
- Bulletins
 - Less frequent bulletins with clearer signalling of changes
- Phone support
 - Extend opening hours of phone support
- Make support more personalised, with named contacts, instead of general; allow enquiries about specific claims prior to submission
- Publish a handbook with a comprehensive list of allowable expenses
- Forecasting tool for office costs so they can be estimated to the end of the financial year
- Provide training on dealing with IPSA for proxies
- Quicker communication by email

Payment

- Extend use of payment cards to other categories
- Extend direct payment as not all suppliers accept credit cards
- Allow and/or explain proxy use of payment cards
- Provide a reminder list of payment options available on the website
- Simplification of the payment options – different payment options allowed for different types of claims

Completing claims

- Online input
 - Make the online system simple to use, user friendly and less time-consuming
 - Reconciliation of payment card transactions should be simplified
 - Make some default options/codes instead of

- always using drop-down menus
- Reduce the amount of scrolling left and right required
- Quicker refreshes after filling in boxes
- Less duplication of information requested in claim forms
- Not having to be online for the entire inputting process – filling out offline then logging on to submit for example
- Revert to paper system
- Content of claim forms
 - Create some sort of regular claim process; improve “institutional memory”
 - Getting rid of requirement for printed receipts/documents – accept email and scanned documents

Processing of claims

- Quicker processing of claims
- Queries
 - Directly contact MPs about small errors so they can be sorted there and then

Rules

- Abolish 90-day limit for claims
- End transaction date requirement
- Allow claim for weekly mileage not daily
- De minimis rule on small claims – small daily allowance
- Requiring paperwork on a random-check basis rather than 100%
- End duplication on mileage and travel claims
- Keep the mortgage interest subsidy
- Accommodation rules – rising rents in London – buy flats to rent out to MPs
- Generally, an increased budget
- Greater use of an allowance system

Attitude

- Better understanding of the pressures MPs face – not reflected in our systems and policies.

Other

- Employ an account manager for each MP
- Less emphasis on the term “expenses” for items that are not expenses

Annex A - Personal Data

The survey did not ask MPs for their personal details and, therefore, the responses to the survey were anonymous. Individuals could not be identified from the responses, unless any personal data was entered into the free text fields.

At the beginning of the survey, MPs were informed that the survey would be conducted anonymously and that we may disclose quantitative or qualitative data, including in response to a Freedom of Information request. Where any of the data might identify an individual, MPs are aware that we would withhold that information

Annex B - Survey Methodology

The survey was built using Snap Surveys (Snap) software and uploaded onto the Snap website. A link to the survey was included in an email to MPs from Andrew McDonald, inviting them to take part in the survey. This initially collected 85 responses. A second email was sent out from Andrew McDonald, reminding MPs to take part. This collected a further 43 responses.

The survey was closed after 3 weeks and the results downloaded from the Snap website and imported into the Snap software. The survey analysis took place both in Snap and in Excel.

In addition to quantitative analysis on 14 fixed questions, responses to 8 free text fields were grouped into categories and tallied, allowing those responses to be weighted. All responses from free text fields that were specific suggestions for improvement have been included in the MPs' Recommendations section and are not weighted.

Annex C – Full survey data

Advice and guidance from IPSA

1. *IPSA provides MPs with guidance on the business costs and expenses rules and the system for making claims. How useful are the guidance, website, bulletins and letters provided by IPSA?*

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Not relevant	Responses
IPSA's guidance	9%	64%	15%	12%	0%	[128]
IPSA's website	6%	53%	26%	14%	1%	[128]
MP Bulletins	15%	62%	16%	7%	0%	[128]
Letters to MPs	9%	64%	20%	6%	2%	[128]

- 1a. *Please use the space provided to suggest ways in which our guidance, website, bulletins and letters could be made more useful to you.*

[33 free text responses]

2. *In the last 6 months, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the speed of response when contacting IPSA using each of the following channels?*

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not relevant	
In writing or e-mail	11%	35%	11%	25%	15%	3%	[128]
By phone	19%	28%	14%	21%	14%	4%	[128]

3. *In the last 6 months, how useful was the advice provided by IPSA when you have contacted us through each of the following channels?*

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Not relevant	
In writing or e-mail	16%	47%	23%	9%	5%	[128]
By phone	30%	41%	17%	6%	5%	[128]
Face to face meeting	11%	9%	2%	2%	76%	[123]

Payment cards and direct payment

4. In total 70% of MPs' business costs and expense claims can now be paid direct to suppliers or by using the payment card. Which of the following payment options are you aware of? [Tick all that apply]

Description	Percentage of MPs per option
Payment card for travel	90%
Payment card for utility bills	69%
Payment card for council tax and business rates	65%
Payment card for hotels	48%
Payment card for stationery	64%
Payment card for refuse collection	17%
Payment card for constituency office landline	47%
Travel booked through the trainline.com service	67%
Direct payments to landlords for accommodation or office rent	66%
None of the above	7%
	[126]

5. Which of the following payment options have you used? [Please tick all that apply]

Description	Percentage of MPs per option
Payment card for travel	72%
Payment card for utility bills	38%
Payment card for council tax and business rates	35%
Payment card for hotels	19%
Payment card for stationery	40%
Payment card for refuse collection	5%
Payment card for constituency office landline	27%
Travel booked through the trainline.com service	29%
Direct payments to landlords for accommodation or office rent	43%
None of the above	13%
	[127]

6. Which of the following statements describes your understanding of payment cards or direct payments?

Description	Number
Did not know about some/any of these payment options	35%
Do know about payment options and am using all the options suitable to me	40%
Do know about payment options but need further help	13%
I do not wish to use any payment card or direct payment options	8%
None of the above	4%
	[123]

6a. How can IPSA assist you to make the most of the payment cards and direct payment options?

[30 free text responses]

Using the System

7. Thinking about the changes made to the business costs and expenses system in the last twelve months, how have these changes affected the ease of completing claims?

Description	Number
Much easier	9%
Easier	52%
No change	31%
More difficult	4%
Much more difficult	2%
Not relevant	2%
	[128]

7a. What changes to the expenses system would make it easier to submit your claims?

[44 free text responses]

8. *In the last 6 months, how much time on average have you and your staff spent making claims for business costs and expenses? Please write the average number of hours spent per week for you and for your staff in the boxes below.*

You personally, hours per week
1.6 [mean]

Your staff, hours per week
3.5 [mean]

8a. *Which aspect of submitting claims takes most time?*

[80 free text responses]

9. *How does your answer to Q5 above compare to the amount of time you and your staff were spending prior to the changes to the business costs and expenses system in October 2011?*

Response	Number
A lot less time now	7%
A little less time now	43%
About the same amount of time now	39%
A little more time now	4%
A lot more time now	4%
Not relevant	3%
	[128]

Processing of claims by IPSA

10. *In the last 6 months, how many of IPSA's queries about your claims do you think have been reasonable?*

Response	Number
All of them were reasonable	9%
Most of them were reasonable	16%
Some of them were reasonable	25%
None of them were reasonable	23%
None of my claims have been queried recently	17%
Not relevant	9%
	[128]

10a. *If you think any of IPSA's queries have been unreasonable, please explain briefly why.*

[39 free text responses]

11. *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following aspects of IPSA's current service in relation to your business costs and expenses claims?*

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not relevant	
Speed of processing	4%	32%	16%	29%	20%	0%	[128]
Accuracy of reimbursement of claims to you	24%	45%	21%	5%	3%	2%	[128]
How IPSA handles any queries about your claim	8%	37%	25%	16%	9%	5%	[128]
How IPSA handles collection of repayments from you when required	5%	17%	27%	3%	3%	45%	[128]

11a. *How could IPSA improve the service it provides in relation to your expenses claims?*

[59 free text responses]

MP's use of expenses

12. *In the last 12 months, have you ever decided not to claim any expenses for which you believe you could have been reimbursed?*

Response	Number
Yes	85%
No	15%
	[128]

13. *Which of the following, if any, were reasons for not claiming a business cost or expense when this has happened? [Please tick all that apply]*

Responses	Number
The claim process was too complicated	37%
It was only a small claim	69%
It would take too long	52%
I wasn't sure if it was claimable	19%
I wasn't sure what amount I could claim for	7%
I was concerned about the claim being published	40%
I was worried the claim would be rejected	14%
Other	16%
	[110]

- 13a. If you selected other, please provide further details

[25 free text responses]

Further comments

14. *Please use the box below if there is any further comments you would like to make about IPSA's administration of the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses*

[50 free text responses]