

STATE SERVICES COMMISSION
Te Komihana O Nga Tari Kawanatanga



Understanding the Drivers of *Satisfaction and Trust* in Public Services - A Qualitative Study

For State Services Commission

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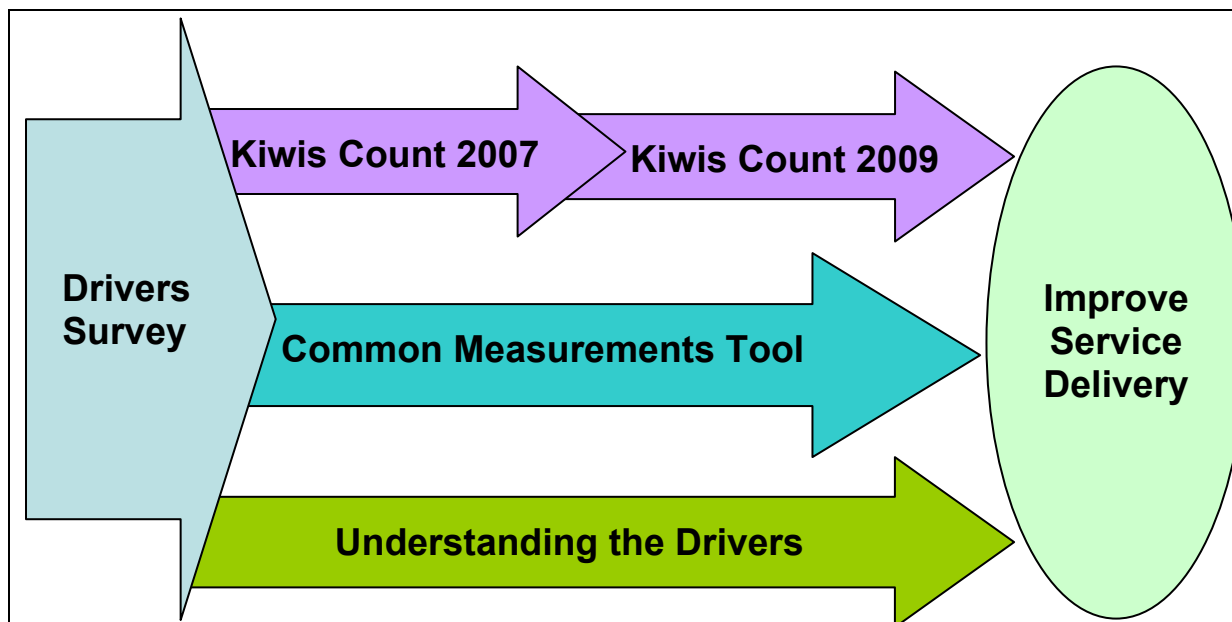
1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2007 as part of the *Accessible State Services Development Goal*, the State Services Commission (SSC) began a programme of research to find out more about New Zealanders' experience of public services (NZE research programme). This included the *Drivers Survey*¹ which successfully identified the key factors (or drivers) that impact New Zealanders' satisfaction with, and trust in, public services.²

To measure how well public services are performing in relation to the drivers a biennial all-of-government national survey called *Kiwis Count*³ was launched in the same year. In addition, the *Common Measurements Tool* (CMT) is available to agencies to measure satisfaction with their own services in a standardised, yet flexible way. Together, *Kiwis Count* and *CMT* let us know how well we are doing in improving the areas that really matter to New Zealanders, and where to focus resources so they have the greatest impact. However, improving New Zealanders' experience of public services is not only about knowing *where* to improve, but understanding *how* to improve.

Understanding the Drivers is a qualitative research project that fills this gap in our knowledge by exploring how New Zealanders understand the drivers. Their views have provided us with a wealth of information to assist public service agencies to become more user-focused and accessible, and to improve the service experience of New Zealanders. The following diagram shows how all the different projects under the NZE research programme relate to improved service delivery.



¹ For full report see <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?NavID=316>

² The SSC identified Canada as a world leader in measuring customer satisfaction to improve service delivery, and the New Zealanders' Experience research programme draws on Canada's best practice approach.

³ For full report see <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?NavID=316>

1.2 Introduction

In March 2008, the State Services Commission contracted UMR Research to undertake qualitative research into the drivers of Satisfaction and Trust. Forty focus groups were conducted over the period May through to July 2008. Population groups included General Public, Māori, Asian, Pacific and Young people (aged 15-30 years).

Understanding the Drivers complements *Kiwis Count*. It asks New Zealanders how they understand those aspects of service delivery measured by *Kiwis Count*. Together the two projects inform service improvement in ways, and in areas that really matter to New Zealanders.

■ Scope

The following tables outline the drivers of satisfaction and trust for each demographic group explored in the research. While the order of importance for each driver varies from group to group, the actual drivers are largely the same. The percentage in brackets relates to satisfaction (or trust for the trust drivers). For example, the four satisfaction drivers listed for Māori account for 77% of their satisfaction with service quality.

➤ Drivers of satisfaction

General Public (66%)	Maori (77%)	Pacific (57%)	Asian (57%)	Young People (62%)
Met expectations	Treated fairly	Competent staff	Met expectations	Met expectations
Competent staff	Competent staff	Kept promises	Treated fairly	Kept promises
Kept promises	Kept promises	Good value	Good value	Treated fairly
Treated fairly	Individual circumstances	Admitted mistakes	Competent Staff	Competent Staff
Individual circumstances	Good value	Understood process	Kept promises	Good value
Good value			Individual circumstances	

- The service experience met your expectations (*Met expectations*)
- Staff were competent (*Competent staff*)
- Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do (*Kept promises*)
- You were treated fairly (*Treated fairly*)
- Your individual circumstances were taken into account (*Individual circumstances*)
- It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (*Good value*)
- They (public servants) admitted responsibility when they made mistakes (*Admitted mistakes*)
- You were aware of what to do every step of the process (*Understood process*)

➤ Drivers of trust

General Public (57%)	Maori (61%)	Asian (60%)
Confidence public servants do good job	Confidence public servants do good job	Confidence public servants do good job
Provides services that meet your needs	Public servants treat people fairly	Provides services that meet needs
Public servants treat people fairly	Provides services that meet your needs	Public service keeps its promises
Public service keeps its promises	Provides you will all the information needed	
Admits responsibility when makes mistakes		

- You have confidence that public servants do a good job (*Confidence public servants do good job*)
- The Public Service provides services that meet your needs (*Provides services that meet your needs*)
- Public servants treat people fairly (*Public servants treat people fairly*)
- The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do (*Public service keeps its promises*)
- The Public Service admits responsibility when it makes mistakes (*Admits responsibility when makes mistakes*)
- The Public Service provides you with all the information you need (*Provides you will all the information needed*)

What is clear from the above tables is that *Understanding the Drivers* is about understanding what matters specifically to *Māori, Asian, Pacific* and *Young* people as much as it is about all New Zealanders. It is also important to clarify that while services across the *public sector* provided context to people’s experiences and perceptions, the term used to describe them is *public services*. This term was used in *Kiwis Count* after pre-testing identified *public services* as being widely understood by the public to mean ‘services provided by the government,’ including at the local level.

■ Reading this report

The main objective of this report is to understand the key factors driving New Zealanders’ satisfaction and trust in public services. This report is therefore structured around the drivers. Each driver chapter explains *what* the drivers mean and *how* managers can improve service delivery. These chapters also look at the linkages across drivers. The report includes chapters for demographic groups insofar as their views differ from the general public. The last chapter outlines respondents’ general impressions of public services.

2. Executive Summary

Findings from this research are based on 40 focus groups (around 8 people per group) were held in urban, provincial and rural locations around New Zealand. Groups were held with general public, Māori, Asian, Pacific People and Young People respondents. The groups were held between 30 April and 3 July 2008.

2.1 Overview

- To improve *satisfaction* in the Public Service consideration should be given to placing a priority on ensuring front-line staff have a strong customer/solutions focus. The ability to understand people's needs, to be knowledgeable enough to meet those needs where possible and to be able to communicate and explain things appropriately to people so they understand are fundamental. This may also require the Public Service to be sensitive to a range of cultural and second language needs. Improvements in these areas and giving effect to the Public Service standards of integrity and conduct is likely to lead to substantial improvements in satisfaction in public services.
- To improve *trust* in the Public Service is more challenging. Improving satisfaction and increasing awareness of the Public Service standards of integrity and conduct, including clear demonstration of accountability, may improve levels of trust. Respondents believe it is important that swift and decisive action is taken to address issues when these standards have not been upheld. However, there are other influences on trust. Negative media reports of high profile issues as well as stereotypes of public servants can also influence trust and be prevalent for many years, despite positive personal experiences.
- Improvements to overall expectations can only be objectively measured if service standards are set, so staff know what is expected of them and the public are aware of the standards they can expect to receive. Key services standards, such as realistic and achievable response times should be set and be publicly available to ensure expectations are transparent and there is accountability for fulfilling them. This will help ensure that public servants do what they say they will do.
- While the Internet and telephone may provide more cost efficient ways of providing public services, face-to-face contact is generally the most preferred and trusted channel. Telephone service standards are often criticised and on-line interactions will need to be capable of meeting more complex requirements before the public are satisfied and confident about using them more frequently.

2.2 The drivers of satisfaction

- The most important driver for the general public, Asian and Young People groups was *The service experience met your expectations*. The driver covers almost any contact or experience an individual has with a public service and links to all other satisfaction drivers. Ensuring front-line staff have a strong customer-focus, such as, being able to listen and understand an individual's needs and being knowledgeable of their organisation's services are critical. The ability to be sensitive to people's needs and to be able to communicate with them in a way that they understand are also important. For public service managers it will be important to manage public expectations in terms of what can reasonably be achieved. Attention to these issues is likely to improve satisfaction with public services.
- The driver *Staff were competent* flows from the previous driver, that is, competent staff are those who meet expectations. Thus, improvements to this driver will occur if front-line staff have a strong customer/solution focus, are knowledgeable and are good communicators. It is important for staff to be able to listen, understand needs, explain processes and inform people about their entitlements.
- In terms of the driver *Your individual circumstances were taken into account* respondents said they feel as if they are treated 'as a number', yet they believe their circumstances are unique and in some instances involve a complex set of interconnected interactions with public services. The circumstances that respondents think are most important to take into account are individual disabilities and household circumstances, particularly for families on low incomes or are under pressure for other reasons. Improvements to this driver will occur if front-line staff take the time to listen and understand each individual's situation and have systems in place to manage more complex issues, especially those that involve more than one public service agency. The development of some flexibility for staff within reasonable guidelines to recognise individual circumstances would also be helpful.
- The driver *You were treated fairly* has a lot of over-lap with the previous driver as there is an expectation that all people should be treated according to their needs and these are dependent on an individual's circumstances. The driver is more complex than many others because respondents interpret it in several different ways. Fair treatment can be understood as being non-judgmental and respectful in dealing with people guided by the aphorism 'treat me as you would want to be treated.' Being treated fairly can also mean receiving a quality of service that is expected. It can also mean being treated justly, so that people in similar circumstances are treated the same. For some Māori, being treated fairly has special significance linked to injustices that have occurred since the Treaty of Waitangi which have implications for expectations of public services today. This was also the most important driver for Maori.
- The need for follow-through by staff is particularly relevant to the driver *Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do*. Of all the drivers, this is the one that is most likely to damage trust in public services as doing what you say you will do was regarded as a verbal contract particularly by Māori and Pacific People respondents. The best way to improve this driver is to for public servants to do what they say they will do. For managers, it will be important to establish service delivery expectations that staff can deliver on and to ensure staff are well informed about them, so unrealistic expectations are not made. Any failures to meet a promise should be accompanied by an apology, and an explanation about what happened and what has been done to ensure it does not recur.

- The satisfaction driver that stood out as quite distinct from the rest was *It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent*. When respondents were asked to give examples of other drivers they easily cited personal examples. However, with this driver the predominant examples given were not personal experiences, but generic services of a particular type. Some respondents found it particularly difficult to assess 'value' without clear, quantitative data. Other respondents said that if their service expectations are met that will demonstrate good value for money. This is consistent with the sense of accountability that some respondents attach to the driver, for instance, when the phrase 'I pay taxes, I expect a certain level of service' is used. However, the most common way of explaining what was good value for tax dollars spent was to identify examples of core public services, like health, education, and those important to public safety and security. These services were considered to be 'free', that is, they were not paid for directly by individuals and available to all. Frontline public servants in these services were generally seen to be highly committed, despite being underfunded and working in stressful situations. Improvements to this driver are likely to result from increasing public awareness of the extent of the work departments do, meeting service expectations and the availability of financial data that demonstrates where tax dollars are spent.
- The satisfaction driver *They [public servants] admitted responsibility when they made mistakes* is unique to Pacific People and, as such, was only explored in these groups. The majority of Pacific People reported that they had not experienced this. On the rare occasion that it had been experienced, it sent a powerful signal of respect that Pacific People appreciated. Public servants may need to be more aware that Pacific People, particularly first generation migrants, tend to have low levels of confidence and knowledge in dealing with New Zealand public services. As a result, they are less likely to question when a mistake may have been made, suggesting the need for public servants to be more pro-active in checking for mistakes. As in the case of broken promises, there is an expectation that mistakes should be acknowledged, apologised for and full explanations given.
- The satisfaction driver *You were aware of what to do every step of the process* is also unique to Pacific People. There is a need to recognise that for some, particularly first generation Pacific People, there may be shame felt in admitting to not understanding something. Public servants need to be conscious of this and explain things as simply as possible, ideally in the first language of the individual. The provision of information programmes through community networks and working through close friends and family as intermediaries will go some way to helping people to be better informed. Such initiatives would be equally applicable to first generation Asians for whom English is a second language and those who have low levels of confidence in dealing with public services in general.

2.3 The drivers of trust

- This research shows that a person's trust in the Public Service is largely based on perceptions. Respondents' views were strongly influenced by media reports and anecdotal accounts as well as stereotypes of the Public Service which may be a product of an earlier time. Trust is therefore more difficult to earn. While levels of trust may improve over a longer period of time as satisfaction with personal experiences improve, other influences, such as, media reports and stereotypes mean that improving trust will remain a challenge.

- The most important trust driver is *You have confidence that public servants do a good job*. The driver has strong links to the satisfaction drivers *The service experience met your expectations* and *Staff were competent*. Improving the competency of staff in a way that better meets service expectations will therefore improve trust that public servants do a good job. Key competencies to focus on are to ensure staff are helpful, knowledgeable, listen, understand and are customer/solutions focused.
- In general, respondents saw significant overlap between the satisfaction driver *You were treated fairly* and its companion trust driver, *Public servants treat people fairly*. Respondents tended to bring up personal experiences, as opposed to general perceptions, when discussing this driver. As a result, the sorts of things that are likely to improve the satisfaction driver may improve the trust driver, such as, treating people non-judgmentally.
- Respondents also saw considerable overlap between the satisfaction driver *Staff kept their promises – that is they did what they said they would do* and the trust driver *The Public Service keeps its promises, that is, it does what it says it will do*. Again, improvements which apply to the satisfaction driver, such as, ensuring public servants do what they say they will do and managing realistic expectations, are likely to improve levels of trust in this driver.
- The driver *The Public Service provides services that meet your needs* is somewhat more complex as it is understood in two different, but not mutually exclusive ways. At one level, 'your needs' are interpreted as personal and refer to meeting service expectations, such as, being listened to and understood by public servants with the knowledge to help. This means that improving trust may be improved if Public Service meets service expectations. However, 'your needs' is also understood in a more universal sense for society as a whole. In that case, trust may improve if it is perceived that essential core services, such as, those that provide health, education, safety and security are met. This is why, for example, negative media stories about service shortcomings in these areas can weaken trust.
- The trust driver *The Public Service provides you with all information you need* is unique to Māori and as such was only explored in these groups. The meaning of this driver was frequently illustrated by reference to not being provided with full information to entitlements. The driver was also explained in terms of difficulty understanding how 'the system works' and insufficient explanations for decisions. Improvements to levels of trust in this driver may result from a strong focus on treating people as individuals, taking time to understand their needs and being able to communicate and explain things in a simple and clear manner.
- There is strong support for the Public Service's standards of integrity and conduct to be well publicised so the public can hold staff accountable for them. There is very limited awareness of the standards and there is a perception gap between the words and the delivery at present. Although these standards are used for internal purposes, respondents felt it would be important for there to be increased awareness of them among the public because they said it would lead to greater accountability.
- There is a perception that the Public Service does not tend to admit responsibility for its mistakes. There is also a perception that high profile breaches of ethics by senior public servants are indicative of further problems that have not seen the light of day. It is important that action is taken swiftly to address breaches.

2.4 Unique perspectives

- Māori, Asian and Pacific People respondents stress the need for cultural sensitivity. Perceptions of racism are voiced across these three populations.
- Some Māori view fair treatment by the Public Service through the lens of past injustices from a failure to honour the Treaty of Waitangi. This can lead to a blurring of perceptions of the role of the Crown, government and the Public Service.
- When dealing with Māori the Public Service need to be sensitive to *whakama* (shame or embarrassment), which may prevent some Māori from accessing the services they are entitled to. This may be because they are too ashamed to admit their knowledge is lacking and to save face will simply say they understand when in fact they do not. A similar issue exists for some Pacific People, particularly those who have migrated or for whom English is a second language.
- First generation Pacific People tend to demonstrate a lack of confidence in dealing with public services. There appears to be a need for widely used public services to communicate through the Pacific People's community channels to build understanding and trust in using these services.
- Pacific People and Asian respondents who have migrated tend to assess the merits of New Zealand's public services against their own international experiences. Generally, the New Zealand public services compare favourably.
- Asian respondents appear to place more stress on speed and efficiency of services as important aspects of meeting their expectations.
- Asian respondents interpreted staff competency differently to other groups, tending to view it as implying outstanding as opposed to somewhat above average service which was the interpretation given by other groups.
- Young People appear to have a stronger preference for on-line service delivery and school aged students place a premium on being treated with respect. The speed of service is more important for the youngest respondents than for other groups.
- Rural-provincial dwellers perceive unfairness is demonstrated by the relative lack of public services available to them locally. The most trusted channel, face-to-face contact is less likely to be readily available, so there is more reliance on the phone. However, as this report shows, the most frustrating channel is the phone. This may be a more pronounced issue for rural-provincial people. They also have concerns about access to emergency services and dislike centralised call-centres being unaware of local place names.

2.5 Perceptions of the Public Service

- Perceptions of the Public Service can generally be placed into four broad categories covering the type of relationship the public have with it, the dominant traits of the service, the quality of services it provides and the role it plays in society. The extent to which individuals perceive the Public Service in each of these categories can have a direct bearing on their expectations of public services and the way they interact with them.
- Some respondents characterised their relationship with the Public Service as very powerful relative to themselves and some feel threatened as a result.
- Respondents perceived the Public Service as complex, closed, difficult to deal with, and rule-bound. Positive traits associated with the Public Service included being helpful, culturally sensitive and accessible.
- The Public Service is generally perceived to provide poorer quality services than the private sector. Respondents reported that the Public Service lacked a strong customer focus and did not appear to be accountable to the public it serves. As the sole provider of many services to the public respondents felt they had little ability to influence service improvements. These perceptions appeared to reinforce feelings of disempowerment.
- A small number of respondents had a more benign impression of the Public Service reflecting their view of its role as a provider of services including essential services that everyone needs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research and focus groups

Qualitative research is the most appropriate methodology to use in order to understand what people mean by each driver. It essentially involves an exploration of the subjective perceptions of respondents based on their experiences using their constructs and language. It focuses on underlying drivers of perception, identifies the range of issues involved, allows an assessment of the intensity with which views and attitudes are held, and gives a feeling for the language used. Typically, it is characterised as research concerned with open-ended questions like “What are the reasons?”, “What is the thinking behind that? etc”. In contrast, quantitative research is concerned with measurement and is necessary to establish, with some certainty, the extent to which views and attitudes expressed in qualitative research are held throughout wider populations. Typically, it focuses on questions of measurement, such as, “How many, how often, what proportion ...?” Qualitative research is suited for exploratory research that seeks to gain understanding while quantitative research can subsequently be used to confirm and measure qualitative findings. Qualitative research can also provide insight to quantitative findings, such as in this research, where respondents explained what they understood by the satisfaction and trust drivers.

Focus groups were chosen as the qualitative methodology for this study. They have the advantage of enabling the exploration of issues in a dynamic social setting which can provide exceptionally rich information from the interchange of ideas in a group discussion. It is through the group interaction that each respondent adds their own perceptions to the shared circumstances of the group and in this way atypical factors can be better tested and identified through group experiences. Similarly, the group environment ensures that a full range of perceptions are identified and the differences between them explored. This is best achieved by exploring such issues among groups with similar demographic characteristics.

3.2 Matrix of focus groups by type and location

The State Services Commission in its brief determined the eight locations where it wanted focus groups held. UMR recommended the distribution of groups by location based primarily on those locations where a significant minority of the sub-populations of Māori, Asian and Pacific People were located. Another factor that influenced selection was the need to ensure a representation of rural areas that was broadly reflective of the general population. A total of nine groups were held in rural areas, five in the Far North and four in the Clutha and Waitaki Districts. The following table shows where the groups were located and the populations and sub-populations in each area sourced from Statistics New Zealand’s 2006 Census data.

Location	General Pop	Māori	Pacific	Asian	Young people 15-30
Far North District	1 x group Total Pop: 55,845	3 x groups Total Pop: 22,113 (40%)	1 x group Total Pop: 1,572 (3%)	Total Pop: 783 (1%)	
North Shore City	2 x groups Total Pop: 205,605	Total Pop: 12,519 (6%)	Total Pop: 6,537 (3%)	3 x groups Total Pop: 55,845 (18%)	1 x group (Younger working 18-23 years)
Manukau City	2 x groups Total Pop: 328,968	2 x groups Total Pop: 47,346 (14%)	2 x groups Total Pop: 86,616 (26%)	2 x groups Total Pop: 66,720 (20%)	
Hamilton City	2 x groups Total Pop: 129,249	2 x groups Total Pop: 24,576 (19%)	Total Pop: 5,139 (4%)	1 x group Total Pop: 13,047 (10%)	1 x group (Older Working 24-30 years)
Lower Hutt City	2 x groups Total Pop: 55,845	1 x group Total Pop: 16,281 (14%)	2 x groups Total Pop: 10,095 (10%)	1 x group Total Pop: 8,361 (9%)	1 x group (School 15-17 years)
Dunedin City	1 x group Total Pop: 118,683	1 x group Total Pop: 7,362 (6%)	Total Pop: 2,535 (2%)	1 x group Total Pop: 6,129 (5%)	1 x group (Tertiary)
Waitaki District	2 x groups Total Pop: 20,223	Total Pop: 1,089 (5%)	Total Pop: 222 (1%)	Total Pop: 354 (2%)	
Clutha District	1 x group Total Pop: 16,839	Total Pop: 1,482 (9%)	Total Pop: 135 (1%)	Total Pop: 123 (1%)	1 x group (Young Family with dependent children)
Total Groups	13	9	5	8	5

3.3 Satisfaction and trust drivers by population

The table (following) outlines the satisfaction (S) and trust (T) drivers that were explored by each population group. All the drivers were covered during the course of this work. A small number of groups discussed the wider concept of trust and how it applied to the Public Service.

A further adjustment was made to the discussion guide after the first wave of 12 groups had been conducted. This was to introduce a projective exercise to gain more understanding into general impressions of the Public Service as it was apparent that the original discussion guide was not providing the depth of insight sought. The discussion guides are appended to this report.

General population	Māori	Pacific	Asian	Young People (15-30)
The service experience met your expectations (S)			The service experience met your expectations (S)	The service experience met your expectations (S)
You have confidence that public servants do a good job (T)	You have confidence that public servants do a good job (T)		You have confidence that public servants do a good job (T)	
Staff were competent (S)	Staff were competent (S)	Staff were competent (S)	Staff were competent (S)	Staff were competent (S)
The Public Service provides services that meet your needs (T)	The Public Service provides services that meet your needs (T)		The Public Service provides services that meet your needs (T)	
Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do/The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do (S+T)	Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do (S)	Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do (S)	Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do/The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do (S+T)	Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do (S)
You were treated fairly/Public servants treat people fairly (S+T)	You were treated fairly/Public servants treat people fairly (S+T)		You were treated fairly (S)	You were treated fairly (S)
Your individual circumstances were taken into account (S)	The Public Service provides you with all information you need (T)	They [public servants] admitted responsibility when they made mistakes (S)		
The Public Service admits responsibility when it makes mistakes (T)		You were aware of what you needed to do every step of the process (S)		
It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (S)	It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (S)	It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (S)	It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (S)	It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent (S)

3.4 Satisfaction and trust drivers by population

As it was not possible to cover all drivers in all groups, it was decided that in almost all cases only three drivers would be covered in any one group. The exceptions were that where a satisfaction driver and a trust driver were obviously closely linked, such as, *Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do (S)* and *The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do (T)* and *You were treated fairly* and *Public servants treat people fairly* they were discussed in the same group. Some also included additional discussion on *general trust*.

Some drivers were explored across more groups than others. The rationale for this was that there were some drivers the State Services Commission had indicated it knew least about, such as, *It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent* and those that were more likely to take longer to discuss, such as, *The service experience met your expectations*. It was also important to ensure key drivers like these were covered in both urban and rural groups as well as across population groups where applicable.

The information below outlines the drivers that were explored in each group and summarises the number of urban and rural groups in which the drivers were covered.

■ Satisfaction drivers by population

➤ General public (13 groups)

	Met Expectations	Treated Fairly	Competent Staff	Kept Promises	Good Value	Individual Circumstances
Far North	✓	✓	✓			
North Shore	✓		✓	✓		
		✓			✓	
Manukau		✓				✓
Hamilton			✓		✓	
		✓				
Lower Hutt		✓				
						✓
Dunedin	✓			✓	✓	
Waitaki	✓					
				✓	✓	
Clutha	✓				✓	
No. Urban	2	4	2	2	3	2
No. Rural/ Provincial	3	1	1	1	2	-
TOTAL	5	5	3	3	5	2

➤ **Māori (9 groups)**

	Treated Fairly	Competent Staff	Kept Promises	Good Value	Individual Circumstances
Far North	✓		✓		
		✓		✓	
Manukau	✓		✓	✓	✓
		✓			
Hamilton				✓	
				✓	✓
Lower Hutt	✓		✓		
Dunedin				✓	
No. Urban	3	2	2	5	2
No. Rural/ Provincial	1	-	1	-	-
TOTAL	4	2	3	5	2

➤ **Asian (8 groups)**

	Met Expectations	Treated Fairly	Competent Staff	Kept Promises	Good Value	Individual Circumstances
North Shore	✓	✓		✓		
					✓	
Manukau	✓					✓
		✓		✓		
Manukau			✓		✓	
Hamilton		✓	✓			
Lower Hutt	✓	✓				
Dunedin					✓	✓
No. Urban	4	4	2	2	3	2
No. Rural/ Provincial	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	4	4	2	2	3	2

➤ **Pacific People (5 groups)**

	Competent Staff	Kept Promises	Good Value	Admitted Mistakes	Understood Process
Far North			✓	✓	✓
Manukau		✓	✓	✓	
	✓	✓			✓
Lower Hutt	✓	✓			✓
		✓	✓	✓	
No. Urban	2	4	2	2	2
No. Rural/ Provincial	-	-	1	1	1
TOTAL	2	4	3	3	3

➤ **Young People (5 groups)**

	Met Expectations	Treated Fairly	Competent Staff	Kept Promises	Good Value
North Shore	✓	✓			✓
Hamilton	✓			✓	✓
Lower Hutt	✓	✓	✓		
Dunedin	✓	✓		✓	
Clutha	✓	✓			✓
No. Urban	5	4	1	2	3
No. Rural/ Provincial	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	5	4	1	2	3

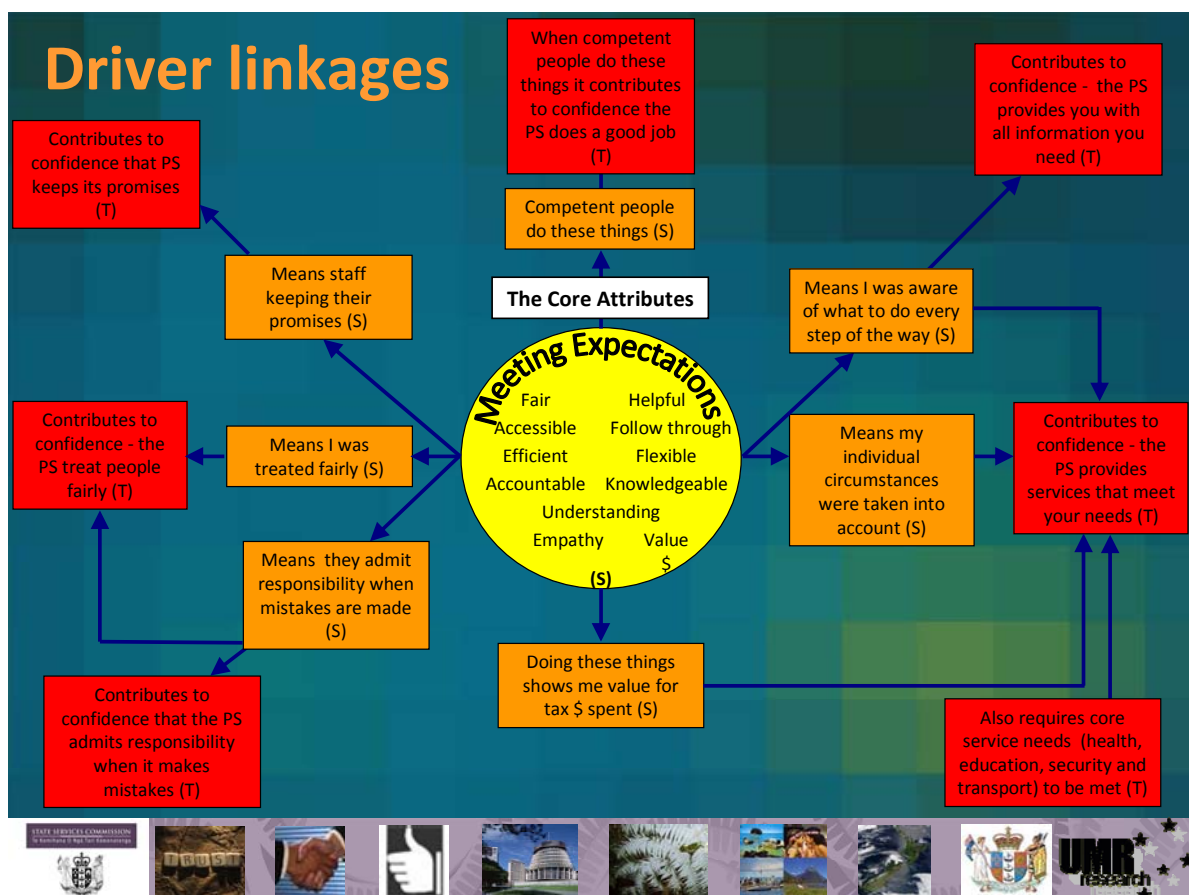
■ Trust drivers (and general trust discussion) by population

	Confidence Do Good Job	Meet Your Needs	Treat People Fairly	Keeps Its Promises	Provides All Information Needed	Admits Responsibility When Makes Mistakes	General Trust
General Public (13 Groups)							
Far North			✓				
North Shore				✓			
Manukau	✓	✓	✓				
Hamilton		✓				✓	✓
Lower Hutt	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Dunedin		✓		✓			✓
Waitaki	✓	✓					✓
Clutha	✓			✓			✓
No. Urban	3	4	4	2		3	3
No. Rural/ Provincial	2	2	1	1		-	1
TOTAL	5	6	5	3		3	4
Māori (9 Groups)							
Far North		✓	✓	✓			
		✓			✓		
Manukau		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Hamilton	✓	✓				✓	
Lower Hutt		✓	✓	✓			✓
Dunedin	✓				✓		
No. Urban	2	3	2	2	3		1
No. Rural/ Provincial	-	2	1	1	1		-
TOTAL	2	5	3	3	4		1
Asian (8 groups)							
North Shore			✓	✓			
	✓	✓					
Manukau			✓	✓			
Hamilton	✓		✓				
Lower Hutt			✓				✓
Dunedin		✓					
No. Urban	3	3	4	2			1
No. Rural/ Provincial	-	-	-	-			-
TOTAL	3	3	4	2			1
Young People (5 Groups)							
North Shore							
Hamilton				✓			
Lower Hutt							
Dunedin				✓			
Clutha							
No. Urban				2			
No. Rural/ Provincial				-			
TOTAL				2			

4. The driver model – How individual drivers are linked

The diagram below shows how the drivers are linked. The core driver in the centre is the *satisfaction* driver *The service experience met your expectations* because if this is comprehensively achieved all other satisfaction drivers will also be achieved. That does not mean everyone expects all the aspects of meeting expectations identified in the central circle to be met. It may be that just being helpful may be sufficient to meet some people's expectations, though for many respondents public servants who listen, are understanding, knowledgeable and results focused are crucial to being helpful.

The *trust* drivers lie on the outer parameter of the model because achieving high levels of trust in each of these drivers is to an extent but not exclusively, dependent on being satisfied with the corresponding personal experience. Thus, people need to experience staff keeping their promises if they are to have confidence that the Public Service keeps its promises.



There is a direct connection between the most important *satisfaction* driver and the most important *trust* driver. For people to trust the Public Service to do a good job, they need to experience public servants being competent and competent public servants are those that meet service expectations. Trust is also influenced by third party reports. However, negative media coverage of public services may weaken trust in the Public Service to do a good job even though personal experiences suggest otherwise.



5. Drivers of satisfaction

This section of the report devotes a chapter to each of the satisfaction drivers apart from the two drivers that were explored only with Pacific People which will be covered in the Pacific People's section of the report. In these following chapters the focus will primarily be on what was common to all population groups. Any findings that were unique or particular to Māori, Asian, Pacific People and Young People are covered in separate sections specific to those populations later in the report.

5.1 The service experience met your expectations

This driver was explored in the general public, Asian and in all the Young People groups. This is the most important driver for these groups. The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public	1		1				1	1	1
Asian				1		1	1		
Young People			1		1	1	1		1

5.1.1 Overview

Respondents explain what this driver means in terms of personal experiences that typically describe trying to get help to meet a particular need. This is generally the provision of information or a solution to a problem. In most cases this requires the public servant to understand the individual's circumstances and to have the knowledge or expertise to provide the service. This may require public servants to be aware of cultural differences when interacting with the public and it may also mean some discretion or flexibility should be exercised where possible. Where the outcome sought cannot be met, people expect to have an explanation, or an apology if appropriate, as to why the service cannot be provided. There is a strong preference for honesty and transparency about whether the outcome sought can be achieved which can go a long way toward meeting expectations even if the outcome cannot be met.

The service experience has several dimensions. It can include how accessible the public service was, how friendly, polite and approachable staff were or how quickly and efficiently the service agency was performed. Respondents also want the transaction to be simple and straight-forward, so phone delays, speaking to computerised voices and being passed from one staff member to another are common bug-bears to be addressed. A few consider it important the service is provided in a way that assures them their tax dollars are being well spent.

There is also an expectation to receive consistent service and to be treated non-judgmentally and fairly. It is important to ensure promises are kept, that is, public servants do what they say they will do.

Expectations of public services are rated a little above average, but are considered to be somewhat inferior to the private sector. This is generally because of choice and competition in the private sector and that expectations of service are higher when they are paid for directly as opposed to those paid for from general taxation. To improve expectations, front-line public servants need to be strongly customer-focused, good listeners, knowledgeable about the service they provide. In complex cases, having better connections with other public services will also help. Upholding the standards of integrity of the Public Service by being fair, impartial, responsible and trustworthy is also important. It is expected that to improve expectations will require more and better trained front-line staff.

It is important for public servants to be aware of the signals they send to the public depending on the channel used. Body language is important in face-to-face contact, a welcoming and clear voice is critical for the phone, speed and simplicity for the Internet and simplicity for mail. The availability of multiple communication channels is important. There is a preference for face-to-face contact, particularly for complex interactions and where the phone channel is regarded as providing a poorer service though some respondents experience satisfaction using phone and the Internet. And with respect to mail and the Internet these channels can provide documentary evidence of the contact they have had which some find useful. Channels are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.7

5.1.2 Key themes

■ The service experience is broad

The service experience encompasses a very wide range of interactions with public servants. It is usually described as any contact or need that an individual initiates, but in the groups this covered examples from care following an accident, phoning up about tax matters, calling the police for help, applying for a student loan, renewing a driver's licence, obtaining a passport through to buying postage stamps. In all these cases, the service experience boils down to an individual with a need that in almost all instances only the Public Service can provide.

The role of the public servant in the service experience is therefore to help meet that individual's need and the amount of help that is required may be more for those for whom English is a second language or are recent migrants.

In my experience they should be helpful, there should be proper guidance, if there is something I want they have to guide me. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

■ Accessible services

A common complaint about public services where expectations are not met is the difficulty in accessing them when someone needs to talk to a public servant. The greatest frustration centres on contact made by phone. Delays on the phone are an issue as respondents complain about being time poor.

If I want to ring ... I have got to set aside half an hour and I don't have half an hour. (Balclutha, general public, male)

There is also a strong dislike of negotiating computer-generated voice answering systems.

You press button 1 and you get through, then you press button 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and then you go back and you think “well I’ll pick 1, we’ll see if we get this” so you pick 1, you pick 3 and you push that and it says a recorded voice and you go along backwards and forwards and I tell you this, I actually experienced it and I went to see my local MP because I was that furious. (North Shore, general public, male)

For those living outside of main centres a phone-call is often the only practical option available to talk to someone as there are no local offices to visit.

■ Listen, understand and explain

A common refrain from respondents is that they want to be treated as a person rather than ‘a number’. This is because they often see their situation as unique even though it may seem to a public servant dealing with many similar situations as just one of a type. For this reason, respondents feel that it is important for public servants to first of all listen and understand each individual’s situation.

Feeling that you have actually been listened to first of all. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

Respondents also expect public servants to acknowledge not only that they understand their needs, but also cared about meeting them. This is conveyed by showing empathy or that they care about achieving the best outcome for them.

For those people providing the service too, having your best interests at heart. They actually really do care about what your problem is. [Is that the same as empathy?] Yes, probably. Other people have said this as well, but treated as a human being and not a client or a number. (North Shore, general public, male)

I like talking to people who are friendly on the other side of the phone and who show that they actually care about your enquiry. (North Shore, young people, younger working, male)

Understanding though also extends to the public servant being conscious of the need to ensure the member of the public they are dealing with understands what they may need to do or the process they may have to follow. The ability to listen, understand and explain are critical traits for effectively taking into account individual circumstances (see Chapter 5.3) and for competent staff (see chapter 5.2).

■ Knowledge

Public servants are also expected to have the knowledge to meet information needs.

Having reached the right person they have knowledge in what they give to you, they’re not guessing. (North Shore, general public, male)

Knowledge and experience to help people are critical to the driver, *Staff were competent* (see Chapter 5.2), and some more detail on this is covered in the discussion of linkages across other drivers in 5.1.3.

■ Clear communications

The expectation to be listened to and understood flows through to the desire for communications from public servants to be clear and simple. This applies to either the written word or spoken word, and particularly over the phone.

That they actually write to you something which is meaningful and they know how to put a document together, not gobbledegook. Clear communication, well written. (North Shore, general public, male)

Hopefully they don't use jargon that's unknown to you. (Manukau, Asian, male)

■ Flexibility

A key theme that flows through from treating people based on their individual circumstances is the expectation that there should be flexibility to reflect that not everyone can or should be treated exactly the same because each person's circumstances are different.

I think they need to start looking at things as individuals instead of just putting you in a box and saying no you just can't do that because this is how big the box is and you don't get to go out of it. You have to stay in the box. (Dunedin, general public, female)

Some more detail on this is covered in the discussion of linkages across other drivers in 5.1.3 as well as in Chapter 5.3.

■ Consistency of service

Flowing on from the expectation that public servants will be knowledgeable is the expectation that the service, particularly the information provided, will be consistent. Respondents spoke about how they might receive different or contradictory information when dealing with two or more public servants.

The ideal situation for many is to be able to have a single point of contact with a public service so there is no need to re-explain a situation and to receive consistent service. An example of this working well was cited in the case of an accident victim.

My son had an accident and had to have an operation because of it. They couldn't do more for me, they were brilliant, they actually gave me a name of a person I needed to ring and each time I rung I spoke to him and he couldn't have done more for us, he was brilliant. And I think that is what made the difference, you knew who you were going to talk to and you didn't have to go back through the whole bloody thing. It just made a huge difference. (Oamaru, general public, female)

There is an expectation that if a case management system is not practical that public servants have access to and are familiar with an individual's previous case history when contact is made.

You don't have to repeat yourself 100 times. If they have your information in front of them they can read that. (Kaitaia, general public, male)

And that if multiple points of contact are made with a public service that there is consistency between them.

I am saying intra-department, so for example if you are in this organisation you give me some advice I can go to someone else and then they should give me the same advice as well. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

■ Promises

The need for follow through or to keep a promise to do something were seen as important aspects of ensuring the service was completed to ensure expectations were met.

[What makes you satisfied?] *Things are done as they should be. What they promise to provide they should provide.* (Dunedin, Asian, female)

Some more detail on this is covered in the discussion of linkages across other drivers in 5.1.3. and in Chapter 5.5.

■ Customer focus

First impressions on coming into contact with a public servant are important in setting expectations.

Friendly service. Smiling. The first impression is the best impression. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Respondents talked about the need to have a welcoming voice on the phone and some need to be put at their ease in what may seem an intimidating environment to them.

I would approach government departments probably with fear and trepidation and think oh no this is going to be a horrible experience and it's going to take me a long time. (Dunedin, general public, male)

It's a master-slave relationship is how it feels. They're the master and we're the slave. (North Shore, general public, male)

Politeness was expected as it was fundamental to customer service.

I guess friendliness/rudeness if somebody is rude or friendly that makes a big difference. (Hamilton, young people, older working, male)

Train their frontline staff in basic customer service - politeness. (North Shore, general public, female)

And people also wanted to be treated with respect. That can be achieved by being friendly and polite, but it also means being respectful in dealing with special situations.

My wife miscarried about four weeks ago My wife was scanned and they saw up on the TV screen and she said “oh it’s dead, it’s small, just go home”. Not that “I am sorry and there looks like there is a bit of a problem, looks like the wee baby is deceased, it might pay if you stayed in town ...” they just said “go home it will all carry on naturally”. (Balclutha, general public, male)

Expectations of friendliness, politeness and respectfulness are part of establishing a strong customer focus and have implications for staff training (see 5.1.5).

■ Promptness

As indicated earlier, respondents do not like delays in accessing services and phone contact is particularly problematic in this regard. This often translated into a theme that prompt service was expected, but it also extended to other examples like transport services or being placed on waiting-lists. In general, those from Asian groups and young people placed more emphasis on the speed of service as an expectation.

Same as health, the hospital needs to stick to their bookings or any operations that are booked 6 months in advance they might ring you up a month later we have cancelled you and rebooked you for the end of the year. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

■ Fairness

Fair treatment is another firm expectation. This includes the need to be treated in a non-judgmental way by public servants regardless of who you are. Sometimes respondents describe this as being treated with respect.

I expect to be treated fairly. [What do you mean by that?] ... I don’t want to be treated like I’m a criminal or an idiot. (North Shore, general public, female)

Some more detail on this is covered in the discussion of linkages across other drivers in 5.1.3 as well as in Chapter 5.4.

■ Value for tax dollars spent

Although it was not a top-of-mind service experience, it was notable that some respondents asserted that as taxpayers they had certain expectations about the quality of the service they received. This was expressed as an expectation of value for money which for this respondent was provided by efficient service.

Value for my taxes. [What do you mean by that?] When I do need to avail myself of the services of some government department, then I expect them to be run well, that the people there know what they’re doing and that they treat you right. I expect a good service for all those taxes I pay. Good value for money. (North Shore, general public, male)

Some more detail on this is covered in the discussion of linkages across other drivers in 5.1.3 and in Chapter 5.6

■ Expectations of public services versus private

Across all groups it was evident that service expectations were generally lower for the Public Service than in the private sector.

I think it's unfortunate perhaps that our expectations in the Public Service aren't as high as they are in private. So, sometimes our expectations are met, but that is because they were really low to start with. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

From the Public Service my expectation is actually lower than any other service I get. I actually have a lower expectation of it. (Oamaru, general public, female)

One of the main reasons for this perception is that public services are not regarded as facing competitive pressures to do better. The public have nowhere else to go for many of the services the Public Service provides. There is also a higher level of expectation about services that are paid for directly than those paid for from general taxation.

They don't have to fight for survival like most other companies do. (North Shore, general public, male)

The fact that if you don't like what you are getting you would go somewhere else, public services you don't necessarily have that choice. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Of course if you pay for something you definitely feel you deserve more. But if it is free some people say, "oh it is free I don't expect much". (Dunedin, Asian, male)

However, respondent's expectations of public services could be exceeded by staff doing the job thoroughly. Compared with other groups young people tended to have unformed expectations of public services.

It exceeded my expectations because I didn't have any expectations to start off with. Like I pretty much said I'd be lucky if I get this and they do everything and you don't have to worry about it. (North Shore, young people, younger working, female)

5.1.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

As is evident from the themes identified in the previous section, respondents' expectations of the service experience, although unprompted, cover all the other satisfaction drivers that were explored in the focus groups. The following only looks briefly at the linkage with each driver as separate chapters in this report explain in far more detail what each means.

■ Staff were competent

There is a consistent link between what a service needs to be like to meet service expectations and what a competent public servant is expected to do. This is particularly where competent staff are expected to be able to listen and understand an individual's needs and have the experience or knowledge to be able to provide them with an answer or a solution. This goes further than just answering a request for information, but ensuring that people know what they need to do to achieve an outcome, so it could involve an explanation of a process, such as, how to apply for something and the information that might need to be provided.

My service expectations when dealing with government agencies is to get clear answers. You tend to ring them up and talk to people who don't really know what they are doing. (Balclutha, general public, male)

A staff member can still behave competently even if they do not have the knowledge or experience to provide the information needed. They can do this by either referring the inquiry to someone who does know or find out the information required. Respondents get frustrated when this does not occur.

I was always taught being in the service industry to say "sorry I am not too sure about that but please give me your name and number and I will get back to you". Now tell me when have you had that said to you. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

If the service cannot be provided within a reasonable level of expectations, there should be an explanation and an apology. People would far rather public servants be open and honest if they do not have the knowledge.

Competent staff are considered helpful and are generally seen to be empathetic and take ownership of the problem or request and actively seek solutions. It is competent staff therefore who enable key service expectations to be met and contribute to confidence that public servants do a good job. Chapter 5.2 discusses competent staff more fully and Chapter 6.1 discusses confidence in public servants doing a good job.

■ Your individual circumstances were taken into account

As with the previous driver, there are similar linkages between this and the core expectations of *The service experience met your expectations* driver. This is largely because in order for a public servant to know what an individual's circumstances are they have to listen and understand what an individual's need is, so they know what may be taken into account. As discussed, the ability to listen and understand are fundamental to being a competent public servant.

The ability to take into account individual circumstances led respondents to say staff needed to have some discretion or ability to be flexible in their dealings with customers. There was a strong perception that public servants were too tightly bound by rules and regulations which could be counter-productive.

I think with the council they have just got themselves tied up in so many knots and rules and regulations. (Balclutha, general public, female)

The desire for greater flexibility was not a call to disregard rules and regulations. Rather respondents felt that staff should be able to exercise some discretion where a standard approach was not appropriate, but generally more by exception.

A few respondents also included among their service expectations that public servants should provide advice about other options that might be available to them. In this way, public servants would also show that they were taking into account individual circumstances.

Having different options I would say like not just having one option which everyone has to meet because I know some people can't meet it and there should be another option where the service should be almost equal in a sense. Although it won't result in the same ending but there should be different options that is what I feel. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

By applying greater discretion and indicating options, public servants are likely to help dispel a commonly held perception among respondents that the Public Service is inflexible.

Chapter 5.3 discusses taking individual circumstances into account more fully.

■ You were treated fairly

The most identifiable linkage between this and *The service experience met your expectations* is that that respondents regard it as unfair as taxpayers, who have by implication paid for a service, to be delivered it in a way that does not meet their expectations. Even so, when discussing *The service experience met your expectations* respondents generally rated their expectations of public services a little above average which suggests that it takes particularly poor service to be perceived as unfair.

As noted, there was an expectation for people's individual circumstances to be taken into account. In order to treat people fairly staff need to treat their customers according to their needs and that not all needs are the same.

Generally, there is a presumption that public services are fair. Even so, there were examples of where respondents felt they had been discriminated against. In this example, the Asian respondent had been born in New Zealand though he felt on occasions that he was not treated the same as others.

Some bus drivers are nice, other bus drivers they say hi to everyone in front of you, but not you. I don't know if it is a racist thing. And you are white, I am sorry but racism is prevalent even in Dunedin (Dunedin, Asian, male)

Other examples of being treated unfairly included feelings of being treated differently because of one's income or age. Thus, the expectation that a public servant will be non-judgmental in providing a service relates directly to treating people fairly.

Fair treatment is discussed more fully in Chapters 5.4 and 6.4.

■ Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do

Exploration of *The service experience met your expectations* shows that there is a strong expectation of follow-through by public servants when dealing with an issue. This is directly linked to public servants doing what they say they will do. And it was evident from exploration of the promises drivers (see Chapter 5.5 and 6.5) that almost any commitment a public servant makes to a member of the public to do something for them can be considered a promise.

Do what they say they are going to do to help, even if it means calling back, etc. Don't just say "okay, we're going to do something" and that's it, you're out of there. (North Shore, Asian, male)

Breaches of promises are very damaging to trust in public services.

■ It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

A few respondents in discussing the service expectations driver asserted that as taxpayers they had certain expectations if not a right to receive the quality of service they expected. Evidence for this was given by examples where respondents cited examples of poor service experiences, which in this example was getting the run-around when making a phone inquiry.

If you are a tax-payer because we all pay our taxes and if it's a service provided by the government then we pay for them to be able to give us the run around on the phone. (Balclutha, general public, female)

While this was the most direct linkage to the good value for tax dollars spent driver, there were some respondents who, when they were discussing that driver, said they received value for money when their service expectations were met. This tended to be seen as ensuring the completion of the service in an efficient or effective and seamless manner as a result of the public servant taking ownership and accountability for ensuring matters are followed through to provide a result.

In the full discussion on value for tax dollars spent in Chapter 5.6, it is clear that the way some respondents determine that value is on the basis of how well their service expectations are met. Thus, raising service to better meet service expectations is likely to increase satisfaction with good value for tax dollars spent.

■ Trust

There is a strong linkage between meeting service expectations and trust in public services. If public services do not do what people expect of them, then the services are no longer relied upon or trusted to do a good job. That means confidence that public servants do a good job is lost (see Chapter 6.1). Also, it was evident that providing services that meet 'your needs' includes meeting many service expectations (see Chapter 6.2). And the reliability that service expectations will be met encompasses keeping promises and treating people fairly both of which have a direct bearing on whether respondents trust the Public Service to keep its promises or that public servants treat people fairly (see Chapters 6.4 and 6.5).

5.1.4 Differences across groups

There was a high degree of similarity across the groups with very few differences emerging particularly in respect to the core elements of service expectations – listening, understanding, showing empathy and being knowledgeable and solutions-focused. The following differences were noted:

■ Asian groups

Chapter 9 in this report identifies unique findings to emerge from the Asian groups where some of these differences are addressed in more detail.

➤ Assistance to understand

Asian respondents for whom English was a second language had more of an expectation that public servants would help them to understand things. This is important to enable better access to services.

➤ Fairness

There was an expectation from these groups that they would not be discriminated against. Examples of what respondents felt were racial discrimination were provided in the groups. Racial discrimination was not raised as an issue in the general public groups.

➤ Speed and efficiency

Respondents in the Asian groups placed a higher level of expectation on the speed and efficiency of services.

You'll be more happy with a faster rate, rather than waiting for a long time. If I compare it to something like maybe when I ring my Internet company up, which is a private service, I get really angry when I have to wait for a long time, whereas with the student loan it's kind of like "oh yeah, I'm just going to have to wait until someone picks up". (Manukau, Asian, male)

Things done in a timely manner like if they say it's a week then it should be just a week instead of three weeks. (Dunedin, Asian, female)

■ Young People

➤ Speed and efficiency

This was also an important expectation for young people who showed more inclination to use the Internet as a channel.

➤ **Fairness**

For the school students, it was particularly important for them to be treated fairly and with respect. This referred most directly to their sensitivity to being treated differently due to their age or the way they dressed or looked, for instance, those who dye their hair or pierce their body feel they are not treated fairly or with respect.

■ **Rural-Provincial groups**

➤ **Access to services**

Those in rural-provincial areas noted the limited opportunities they had for face-to-face contact and their reliance on interaction over the phone. Given that the phone channel was the most problematic channel with respect to service expectations this may have special implications for rural people. For instance, face-to-face contact is the most trusted and most favoured channel to use when complex situations arise.

A lot of these places we don't have the choice of face-to-face. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

Rural-provincial respondents also raised the lack of access to services locally relative to those from urban areas.

[Any other comments on how things could be improved in terms of services and the likes to meet expectations?] *I think sometimes particularly at government level the bottom half of the South Island doesn't really exist. You feel as if a lot of the policy is geared towards Auckland. [Are you thinking of anything in particular?] Probably their emphasis on public transport ...we haven't even got public transport here. It doesn't exist. (Balclutha, general public, female)*

➤ **Fairness**

Some respondents from rural-provincial areas noted that services were unfairly allocated to their detriment. They said they were taxpayers like anyone else, but received fewer services relative to those in urban centres and this they felt was unfair. For instance, in the quote above, local taxpayer's money was seen as helping to fund public transport in Auckland when none existed locally. Respondents also spoke about how the rural sector was the backbone of the economy, yet it received fewer public services. This was considered unfair.

5.1.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

Respondents in the groups were asked to think of ways in which the Public Service could improve service expectations. Their views contribute heavily to the suggestions outlined below.

➤ ***Recruitment***

Most groups placed stress on the need to increase the number of front-line staff who were seen to be under-resourced as demonstrated by delays and waiting-times to access services. It was important though that the right people should be recruited for front-line staff work. These had to be people who wanted to help others.

➤ ***Customer service training***

It is important for all front-line staff to be adequately trained and an important aspect of this training is how to deal with customers. This would cover how to greet customers, politeness and respect. It would also need to include training in techniques for learning how to find out what people's needs are and how to deal with difficult customers as well as how to treat each customer as new irrespective of how demanding the previous one has been.

➤ ***Knowledge training***

As people contact public services for information or to have problems solved, public servants have to have the knowledge and experience to meet those needs. It is critical therefore that those new to the front-line are well trained across the range of inquiries they are likely to receive and that there are support systems in place for all on the front-line to cover other contingencies that may arise. Equally, it means being adept at asking the right questions to understand what people need as that might not always be apparent. This could require sufficient supervisors or those with higher levels of experience and knowledge being available to provide support when needed. In the event that the public cannot be helped at the time, it is absolutely essential that arrangements are made to follow-through so an individual's needs are met.

➤ ***Seamless services and interconnections***

When more complex situations arise, which may require someone to interact with more than one public service, public servants need to be aware of the interconnections that may exist. For instance, a person's income entitlements may also indicate potential issues around housing or child-care needs and household circumstances may have implications for tax and entitlements for the individual and others in the family. While staff training should incorporate awareness and knowledge of the more likely interconnections that might exist, public services themselves should endeavour to engage in cross-departmental collaboration with the aim of providing a one-stop-shop for interconnected services.

➤ ***Communication training***

It is critical for people to understand how to deal with public sector processes and its requirements. They also want explanations when an outcome they seek cannot be achieved. These expectations mean front-line public servants need to be able to communicate clearly and simply to ensure all members of the public can understand. This will require the ability to provide information in the main second languages used in New Zealand. Information should be provided which is as accessible as possible and special care should be taken to ensure the written word is jargon-free.

➤ ***Service standards***

Improvements to overall expectations can only be objectively measured if service standards are set, so staff know what is expected of them and the public are aware of the standards they can expect to receive. Key service standards, such as realistic and achievable response times, should be set and be publicly available to ensure expectations are transparent and there is accountability for fulfilling them. This will help ensure that public servants do what they say they will do.

➤ ***Apologise, explain and fix***

It is inevitable that not all expectations and service standards will be met all the time. When they are not met, the public should be provided with an apology, an explanation as to why it occurred and how the problem will be fixed in future. This should be standard and will signal that there is a commitment to meeting expectations and accountability for doing so.

➤ ***Standards of integrity and conduct***

Standards of integrity and conduct already exists for public servants. While this was not discussed in the context of exploring this driver, it was discussed in other groups and it was apparent that there is very low awareness among the public that these standards exist. However, as the standards specifically cover critical service expectations with respect to fairness, accessibility, impartiality and working to the best of people's abilities, they have a role in ensuring expectations are met. As discussed in the general trust section of this report (see Chapter 6.6), the standards need to be easily accessible to the public to ensure commitment and accountability to them.

➤ ***Flexibility within fixed guidelines***

As respondents expected individual circumstances to be taken into account, some discretion or flexibility is required. This should not be at the expense of fairness to others. Nor does it imply that some people are different under the law. It simply needs public services to recognise that not all needs are the same. Therefore, where possible, guidelines should be established that provide for some flexibility in the way policies are implemented and people are helped.

➤ ***Multi-cultural sensitivity***

It was evident in the Asian groups that people from minority cultures in New Zealand are sensitive to issues like discrimination and will have different cultural practices and beliefs that may mean they take offence in situations that may not easily be foreseen by others. Customer training should ensure front-line staff are attuned to these issues when dealing with members of the public from minority cultures.

➤ ***Rural needs***

Rural respondents have fewer opportunities to interact face-to-face with public servants, yet this is the preferred channel for many. Consideration should be given to providing mobile services and this underscores the need for quality phone services (see below).

➤ **Channels**

The predominant channels used by the public are face-to-face and phone with the latter being the most problematic. Significant improvements to service expectations will result from more customer-focused, front-line staff, but attempts need to be made to reduce common frustrations such as delays in obtaining a response over the phone. There is a fuller discussion of channels in Chapter 5.7

5.2 Staff were competent

This driver was explored in all population groups. The Young People's group was held with school students aged 15-17 years. The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public	1		1		1				
Māori	1			1					
Asian				1	1				
Pacific				1		1			
Young People						1			

5.2.1 Overview

As noted in the previous chapter, there is considerable over-lap between many aspects of meeting service expectations and what it means to be a competent staff member because it is competent staff who help people to enable their expectations to be met. To be competent in a job was regarded by most respondents as being capable of doing the job required and a competent person was seen as somewhat above average in their job, but not outstanding.

The job was done, maybe it could have been done a bit better but it was done.
(Kaitaia, Māori, male)

If all the core attributes of being understanding, knowledgeable, customer and solutions focused and a clear communicator are demonstrated by staff, then this would far exceed competency for most.

That's beyond competent to me. That's a dream public service. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

A core attribute of competent staff is that they are knowledgeable or capable of helping meet the public's needs. There is an expectation that staff are honest about their limitations, but can refer people to a staff member who has the knowledge or experience to meet their needs. In order for competent staff to be able to meet the public's needs, they must have the ability to listen and understand what those needs are. And competent staff are motivated to provide solutions and be helpful.

There is another set of attributes that competent staff are expected to possess. They are expected to be approachable, friendly and polite as this gives people more confidence in dealing with a public servant. At the same time, there is an expectation that a public servant will convey confidence as this is an indicator that they are able to meet the needs sought.

- As was found in discussion about the previous driver, there is a higher level of expectation about the competence that is demonstrated when a direct payment is made for a public service.
- Those from rural areas speak positively about the level of personal service they receive when dealing with public servants face-to-face as staff are known to them in the community.
- Māori talk about the need for staff to be reliable which encompasses a positive attitude and commitment as well as capability to do the job required. The reliability to do a job is also closely related to general trust in public services.
- Pacific People stress the need for staff to be culturally sensitive and place more emphasis on the need to ensure staff are helpful and explain things.
- Asian respondents appear more inclined to regard being competent as being outstanding. They also placed more emphasis on competent staff being speedy and efficient. They also had higher expectations that staff should be approachable and able to communicate well.

5.2.2 Key themes

■ Knowledge

The most recurring theme across all groups was that competent staff should be knowledgeable. The knowledge that is required has several dimensions to it. Ideally, staff members need to know what to do or have the capability of meeting the public's need. A common phrase used across different groups to describe knowledgeable people was that they knew what they were talking about.

It's knowledge. They know what they're talking about. If you've got anything that you want to query they've got the answers for you. (Manukau, Māori, female)

It was also desirable that competent staff were empowered to make a decision.

■ Referral

The first contact point does not necessarily have to be the person with the knowledge to provide a solution, but that person is expected to know who to direct the inquiry to without giving people the run-around.

A competent person would know when to refer to the appropriate resources if they didn't know what was happening or they think you need some other referrals. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

This requires competent staff to be trained so they know who exactly does what in their organisation and are able to advise the public who they are being referred to and why.

[You mentioned that they know people within the organisation is that as important as the knowledge of the job?] I think they go together, they know who is responsible for a particular job, so they can refer you to Mary or John or whoever because that is their area of responsibility. (Kaitaia, general public, male)

Knowledgeable staff were also expected to know the interconnections that may exist with other government agencies, particularly where needs may be complex.

They have access to tools that they can use like Internet and stuff like that, having access to other government agencies to help them answer complicated questions that might involve more than one government department. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

■ Listen, understand and explain

The ability to listen and understand what someone's needs are was another important aspect of competence.

I'd say understanding because when you mentioned public services, when I normally think of the staff there, it's like they just follow the law, black and white, so they're not understanding to your situation. For someone to be competent they'd be understanding to your situation and able to relate to the customer. (Manukau, Asian, male)

A critical aspect of understanding was to understand that each individual's needs are often different.

They need to be able to understand your needs. [Now what do you mean by that?] Some people might have different ways of learning compared to others so they need to be able to recognize that and be able to teach for that need. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, male)

They actually process what you're saying. They listen. (Manukau, Māori, male)

Competent staff were also expected to be proactive in explaining to people what they needed to do or what their entitlements were to ensure people were not put to unnecessary trouble or missed out on entitlements. The need to be helped in this way emerged more strongly for those for whom English was a second language.

They're able to explain the policy and what you're entitled to, or what you should be doing. That's what I would call competence. That straight away you've got the right answer of what you should be doing, what you're entitled to. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

If their communication with us was clearer in the first place and you knew what you had to do and what steps you had to take I think lots of time would be saved. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

It was important for competent staff to be aware of the breadth of needs they might encounter in the community.

It's understanding the different types of people ... and being able to relate to them no matter what creed and what gender, what age. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

■ Customer focused

Customer focus was also a dimension of competency and is an essential part of understanding clients' needs.

For me customer service means being able to gauge what different clients' needs are. Every client is different obviously and you need to be able to be gentle with some clients and more assertive with others. You've got to gauge what each client needs. (North Shore, general public, female)

To be customer focused also meant to follow through and be solutions-focused.

Job gets done. Customer service skills. Feel like they care. (North Shore, general public, female)

A part of customer focus relates to having empathy. This can involve providing a personal touch to the service; something that was identified as more common in small communities where people knew each other.

Somebody knew who I was and they were most concerned about what happened. They actually heard it through the grapevine about the assault and all the rest of it and they were personally concerned and they expedited the whole process for me and they were the ones that helped. (Kaitaia, general public, male)

A friendlier approach was seen as a means of enabling staff to be better positioned to understand people's needs.

If they were friendly you would relax with them and tell them a lot more and they might pick up on a lot more things you should or shouldn't be doing. Rather than everyone be guarded. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

On the other hand, rudeness was seen as a sign of potential incompetence and lack of customer focus.

I just don't like rudeness, if you deal with the public you can't be rude to them and that is what you do get from people over the phone and face-to-face ... you expect politeness. (Hamilton, general public, female)

■ Confidence

Staff who are confident in their manner inspire confidence that they know what they are doing.

I think you need to feel confident ... if you have a person who is a mature person and you feel confident you feel this is good. These are people who know what they are talking about. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

Confidence also inspires trust that the job will be done or that what you are told is correct.

If someone is competent they know what they are doing they are going to be confident about the way they do it. You will know straight away in body language if someone is confident. If you get someone who doesn't have the right body language you think okay how much trust am I going to have that you are going to be competent. (Hamilton, Asian, male)

■ Competency and paid services

As was the case with respect to service expectations in the last chapter, respondents overwhelmingly said they expected higher levels of competency for public services they paid for directly as opposed to those funded through direct taxation.

[Does it make a difference when you're paying for a service how you feel about staff being competent?] *Yes, I expect probably more if I'm paying for the service. I'm expecting the person who's dealing with me knows what they're doing and they can answer my questions. If I have some issues to be clarified I'm expecting them to give me the right answer. (Manukau, Asian, female)*

I just think your expectations would be higher because you put your money down, your own hard-earned money. If you end up paying for these services, I think you expect a whole lot more. Less room for error. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

There was, however, an exception to this in the Hamilton general public group where expectations were generally said to be the same by most respondents.

I still expect the same because it is still my government department and I pay the taxes in the first place. (Hamilton, general public, female)

5.2.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

There are many linkages between the attributes of competent staff and the other satisfaction drivers. This should be no surprise as a reading of the previous chapter showed that meeting service expectations entails delivering on a wide range of expectations and competent staff deliver many of those expectations.

■ The service experience met expectations

There are several direct linkages between the attributes of a competent public servant and this driver. The service experience expectations that are most sought after are the ones that competent staff demonstrate, such as getting the job done (including follow-through), being knowledgeable, the ability to listen, to understand individual needs and where appropriate the ability to explain. As noted, being customer focused, which encompasses having empathy and being friendly and polite, were aspects of competence. In other words, competent staff are generally helpful which was how respondents envisaged what a public servant doing a good job would be like (see Trust below and the discussion in Chapter 6.1 on *You have confidence public servants do a good job.*)

Other aspects of service expectations also emerged, but were more pronounced in some of the population groups as indicated in the next section, such as showing efficiency and being fair in a cultural sense.

■ Your individual circumstances were taken into account

In some groups, understanding people's needs and having the knowledge or experience to provide solutions, which are key attributes of competency, involved taking into account their circumstances, such as the need to explain things to those who might have difficulty understanding what to do or ensuring people in need knew of their entitlements. Chapter 5.3 shows how important the ability to listen, understand and be knowledgeable are to ensuring individual circumstances are taken into account.

■ Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do

This driver has a strong link with competence. Competent staff are those who are able to do the job which often means delivering on the outcome sought by ensuring they follow through. The following quote captures the link between promises (see Chapters 5.5 and 6.5) and competence.

I rang up Wellington and he said send me \$25 or \$26 and you'll get it in three days. So I send the money and bang on, the conversation was just as short as that, put your address etc, send a \$25 cheque and we'll send you the thing ... I don't expect any more. That to me, the delivery, the policy, the money, told me the time, the date, when it was going to be arriving, sent the money and the thing was delivered. To me that is a very competent service. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

By the same token, a failure to keep to commitments is interpreted as a sign of incompetence.

When we applied for student loans, sometimes they say "oh yeah, you're going to get it within two weeks". Sometimes it's like it goes more than two weeks and there's still ... ring up again and they say "oh we forgot to do this and that and you have to bring in this information about yourself". (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

■ Trust

In the previous chapter, it was noted that there was a strong linkage between meeting service expectations and trust in public services. If public services do not deliver what people expect of them, then they are no longer relied upon or trusted to do a good job. Meeting service expectations directly reflects on whether the Public Service is trusted to do a good job. As competent staff do those things which meet service expectations, many of the strong linkages that exist between meeting service expectations and trust in public services apply here too. In the discussion in Chapter 6.1 on the trust driver, *You have confidence public servants do a good job*, those things that give respondents confidence that public servants do a good job include being understanding, knowledgeable and customer focused. These are key traits of competency too.

5.2.4 Differences across groups

While being knowledgeable, understanding and customer as well as solutions focused were common attributes of competence identified across all groups, several differences did emerge in some groups. The following differences are noted briefly as Chapters 7-11 in this report address unique findings to emerge from each of the population groups.

■ Māori groups

➤ *Reliability and trustworthy*

The trustworthiness of staff and the ability to rely upon staff to do a job properly were more significant dimensions to competence in the Māori groups. These aspects of competence were unique to the Māori groups and was particularly evident in Kaitaia.

Reliable covers a lot more, so if you are reliable you know what your job is about, you know it is going to get done not just left. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

If someone is reliable they don't have a blasé attitude about whether they are going to go to work. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

➤ *Clear communications*

Māori and Pacific People and Asian groups identified competent staff as those who fully explained their entitlements to them.

■ Asian groups

➤ **Speed and efficiency**

The Asian groups stressed speed and efficiency of service as more significant attributes of competence than other groups.

I just know personally if someone asks me to do something that I know how to do it properly then I would know how to get from A to B as quick as possible. (Hamilton, Asian, male)

They should be efficient in their work. (Manukau, Asian, female)

➤ **Interpretation of competency**

While other groups interpreted competent staff as performing somewhat above average, the Asian groups, regarded competency as providing a much higher level of capability than somewhat above average.

I think a competent person would be outstanding because not everyone can deliver any kind of service to the best of their ability because in New Zealand we have all kinds of cultures coming together and in order to get satisfaction from it you must be able to gain that kind of knowledge and the skill that comes with the job satisfaction. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

I think competent is the minimum standard you should be aiming for. (Hamilton, Asian, male)

➤ **Clear communications**

This aspect of competence was also raised more strongly in the Asian groups than the general public particularly by those for whom English was a second language.

■ Pacific People groups

➤ **Cultural sensitivity**

The Pacific People respondents were the only ones to raise the need for cultural understanding as a mark of competence.

Know a bit about cultural things, Pacific Island cultures ... it would be nice if there's a Pacific Islander serving you but it's not necessary. If the department has some sort of course about Pacific Island matters ... in terms of the culture, structure, where these people are coming from. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

➤ **Clear communications**

As with the Māori and Asian groups, there was a greater emphasis placed by Pacific People on competent staff being able to communicate in a way that helped people to understand what they had to do or what their entitlements were.

■ Young People groups

➤ *Clear communications*

The ability to communicate so things are clearly understood was particularly important to the school students though these comments were weighted toward the proxy of what a good or competent teacher was like. Clear communications though was a common aspect of competence to all groups.

[What does a good teacher do?] *Knowing the work and knowing how to communicate it. How to get us to know it.* [Making sure that you learn?] *Yes.*
(Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, female)

➤ *Fairness*

Although not directly an issue of competence, a recurring theme in the school student group, which emerged spontaneously in the discussion about competent staff, was the desire to be respected and treated as an adult. To them, good staff are those who treat them with the same respect they would show to anyone else. Thus, while being non-judgmental was a weak aspect of competence across all groups, it was a more significant factor for the students.

What was also important to students of this age was that they wanted to be treated with respect or as equals. This sensitivity about their age was a recurring theme for the school students in discussions on other drivers.

■ Rural-Provincial groups

➤ *Personal service*

Those from rural areas described how they personally knew many of the public servants they dealt with in their community. This resulted in personal service which tended to be service that was more customer and solutions focused and more enjoyable. This somewhat unique perspective lends force to the recommendation that a stronger customer focus will improve satisfaction levels.

5.2.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

It was clear from discussion of the staff competency driver that the most important attributes to have are to be knowledgeable, to be able to listen, understand and explain. This also requires competent staff to be good communicators and pro-active with the provision of information as well as generally customer focused. These attributes support the following suggestions to improve satisfaction levels.

■ Knowledge training

Competent staff are expected to have the knowledge and experience to meet information needs or to solve problems for the public. It is critical therefore that those dealing with those issues are well trained across the range of inquiries they are likely to receive and that there are support systems in place for all

on the front-line to cover other contingencies that may arise. The training should cover the need to ensure that staff know either who to refer inquirers to or where they can obtain the information required to help the public. This may require the design of information bases that are easy for inexperienced staff to retrieve or the presence of a sufficient number of experienced staff who can offer support.

While knowledge is important, it should be remembered that the public are not generally familiar with public service processes, rules and requirements. This lack of familiarity may lead them to be unaware of what to do or the range of entitlements open to them. This can lead to more interactions with public services than is necessary to access what they need. For these reasons, competent staff need to know how to understand what someone's needs may be and to ascertain whether members of the public know what they need to do.

■ Seamless services and interconnections

Following on from the last point, complex situations may require someone to interact with more than one public service. In these instances, public servants need to be aware of the interconnections that may exist across public service agencies. Staff training should incorporate awareness and knowledge of the more likely interconnections that might exist. Where possible, 'one-stop-shops' where agencies are co-located would be another option to improve for the provision of interconnected services.

■ Communication training

If the public are to understand how to deal with Public Service processes and its requirements, staff will need to have the ability to explain matters to them. Explanations though need to go beyond matters of process, but should also encompass the ability to explain why certain outcomes a member of the public seeks cannot be achieved, for instance, because rules or regulations do not permit the outcome or the resources are not available to meet the outcome in the time sought. These sorts of explanations are important because an inability to get the job done is a sign of incompetency and a good explanation may prevent creating that impression. Communications training for front-line staff may be one means of achieving better service in these areas.

Front-line public servants need to be able to communicate clearly and simply to ensure all members of the public can understand. This will require the ability to provide information in the main second languages used in New Zealand. Information should be provided which is as accessible as possible and special care should be taken to ensure the written word is jargon-free.

■ Solutions focused

Front-line staff who first accept an inquiry from the public need to take full ownership of the inquiry with a focus on providing a solution even if that means seeking assistance from others. This is because respondents were critical of being given the 'run-around', particularly when accessing services over the phone. An important aspect of being competent is the ability for the public service provider to get the job done. In the event that a front-line staff member cannot help a member of the public at the time an inquiry is made, it is essential that arrangements are made to follow-through, so an individual's needs are met.

■ Customer service training

All the suggested improvements mentioned up to this point are predicated on competent staff having a strong customer focus. Front-line staff should be trained in how to deal with the public as their customers. Apart from the basic courtesies of being polite and respectful, training would need to incorporate techniques for learning how to find out what people's needs are and how to deal with difficult customers as well as how to treat each customer as new irrespective of how demanding the previous one has been. Specialised training for interactions over the phone, where many service problems are identified, is also important.

5.3 Your individual circumstances were taken into account

This driver was explored in the general public, Māori and Asian groups. The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public				1		1			
Māori		1			1				
Asian			1						

5.3.1 Overview

This driver is generally understood in terms of a public servant making some kind of exception to the norm due to relevant, extenuating circumstances. The scope of individual circumstances this driver could potentially cover is broad enough that taking things into account should not be considered a rarity, but something that public servants need to be conscious of with each person they deal with.

Even though this driver has a strong focus on the individual, respondents felt that in considering the types of circumstances that should be taken into account greater priority should be placed on taking into account the circumstances of those with disabilities or significant household pressures. However, other factors that should be taken into account depending on circumstances were one's age, income, culture, mental state and also relative lack of knowledge of public service rules, regulations and processes. It may even include making allowances for people's time and other commitments they may have. The circumstances are therefore quite extensive.

To ensure individual circumstances are taken into account, public servants must first understand what an individual's needs are as well as their context. This will require skills associated with listening and asking questions. Then, knowledge and experience are required to assess whether those needs can be met in the normal manner or if not, how they can be met given whatever flexibility might be applicable. This means recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach is not always appropriate nor desirable.

Some care needs to be taken when finding out what should be taken into account. Inquiries about a person's ethnicity or income, factors a public servant may consider important to take into account, can cause offence for some respondents. In these circumstances a simple explanation as to why this information is required should suffice. Some respondents reported occasions where the most relevant factors were not taken into account while less relevant ones were.

Taking circumstances into account is not just confined to exercising discretion with respect to established processes. At times, it may require providing extra help or assistance for someone to engage with or to access public services. It may require flexibility to be exercised or even a degree of pragmatism or commonsense to be applied, and on occasions it may involve acting with compassion. In short, the actions required to take individual circumstances into account are ones that put a human face on the Public Service as opposed to the faceless and rule-bound impression which this study found was a common perception.

On the occasions when some flexibility is expected and it does not occur, this can convey a strong sense of being treated unfairly. That is why it is critical that when individual circumstances cannot or will not be taken into account, such as due to a requirement of the law, a full and clear explanation is provided. If the inability to take individual circumstances into account is due to shortcomings of the public service organisation and they would normally have been taken into account, for example, due to a lack of resources at the time, then an explanation of why things cannot be taken into account should be accompanied by an apology.

Unlike some other drivers, like being treated fairly or having promises kept, there is not a presumption that this driver should always apply to everyone. It can therefore make quite a powerful, positive impression on individuals when it is applied.

5.3.2 Key themes

■ Listen, understand and explain

It was fundamental to this driver that public servants knew how to find out what an individual's circumstances were by asking people the right questions and listening to the answers.

[First of all let's look at taken into account, what does taken into account mean to you?] *Well they find out from you, you see going back to when I have helped people I ask them a lot of questions to see exactly what they need so I know where to direct them. So it's about getting to know. Because if you don't know what to ask for, if you don't know what you need you don't ask the right questions. The other person who knows what they have to offer needs to ask enough questions of you. That means getting to know you, asking the questions. Asking you questions so they know what the fit is.* (Hamilton, Māori, female)

Some care though may be needed when inquiring into an individual's circumstances. People can be sensitive to being categorised when questioned, particularly if they feel some information being asked of them is not relevant to what they need.

The first question they ask you is what ethnicity are you and you feel like you are automatically categorised on that. It is one of the standard questions almost every time. And what income bracket you come in. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

Meeting individual circumstances can occur simply by acting with compassion.

You expect compassion in terms of how you treat someone and with respect. Integrity - you want someone to treat you as a person not as a number and that is huge. And the moment someone treats you as a person you may have waited 5 hours, but suddenly that 5 hours isn't an issue anymore because you are being treated as someone who matters. (Manukau, general public, female)

In this example the hospital recognised there was nowhere for the father to stay as he waited for his partner to give birth.

When my partner was having a baby a couple of years ago [the] hospital was really, really helpful. They took into account there was no place to stay out there and they let us stay in the same room and they basically help you out. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

In this example, an Asian respondent's mother, a sickness beneficiary, had to return to China urgently for a funeral. Even though the respondent gave authorities an assurance that she had paid for the airfare no compassion was given for her mother's special circumstances. They remained dubious about how a sickness beneficiary could afford the airfare.

I provided a written statement saying I provided my mother the plane ticket to go back to China to deal with this very sad and sudden situation. Then should they really be questioning it and hounding her? They need to go back, what else are you going to do, let her rot? That really pisses me off because people don't think about how the way they do things affects people in special circumstances. There is no empathy. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Flexibility

Being flexible is often an important aspect of taking an individual's circumstances into account. However, there is no expectation that there should be a wide degree of discretion, but enough where appropriate to make a difference.

They have to have some discretion, they have to have a little bit of discretion or flexibility around what they can or can't do. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

Exercising discretion can have quite a powerful positive effect on impressions of the Public Service as it is not necessarily expected. Demonstrating flexibility does not have to mean applying different rules, it can simply mean accelerating process where it makes sense to do so.

Previous to my job I temped for about a year or so, so some weeks you worked, some weeks you won't and I was off for about a month and obviously needed to supplement my income. So we approached ... and the guy was brilliant he said we can make you an appointment, the nearest appointment is in two weeks time and I said that is effectively useless because I will probably be working in two weeks. So he brought it forward, he managed to find me an appointment the next day and we had the benefit within two weeks and they actually back paid it to when I spoke to the guy. And then I was back at work but he was really good, really fast, really effective. (Manukau, general public, female)

Another respondent gave an example where he had been driving with sub-standard tyres, but had been allowed to continue on his way un-ticketed because he had shown clear intent to change the tyres. It seemed fair not to penalise someone who was going to do the right thing.

Exercising discretion therefore can mean no more than having a can-do attitude to see how something can be achieved within the scope of one's responsibility.

In another example, a respondent wished to challenge in Court a ticket he had received for allegedly not wearing a seatbelt while he was visiting Dunedin from Lower Hutt. The lack of flexibility in not allowing the case to be heard in Wellington meant it was not worth the cost of trying to defend himself against a ticket that he felt had been unfairly given to him.

And in another example it was important for one woman in Kaikohe that the council took into account her pay day, so she was in a position to pay her rates by the due date.

In this example, attempts by whanau to look after elderly parents in their home were obstructed.

Our dad is 91 ... and mum turned 88 ... they refuse to go to a home or go anywhere, they have the homestead there and they just want to stay there. And we have tried to work around the whanau that different ones support them and get some home help in but the rules just seem to be designed to stop anyone going there and even when my sister tossed her job at Otago University to come up and stay with mum but because she brought her computer up and put it in the room next door that was an office so she didn't qualify and all weird things went on. So we were conscious as a family we wanted to do our bit to look after mum and dad and minimize what it costs the State if you send them in to a home. But they wouldn't recognize that. So maybe there needs to be greater recognition of options and solutions that the client might come up with. Not saying do them but entertain a range of options to get a solution that is cost effective for the State and acceptable to the clients and the clients' family. [So pragmatic, practical?] Something that works. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

In this example, the respondent felt that both he and the public service agency would have been better to have assisted him with accommodation close to work rather than bus him daily at considerable cost and inconvenience.

I commuted from Taupiri to Auckland on a daily basis. [They were] quite prepared to pay for me to jump on the intercity bus to get to my work because I couldn't drive. And then pay for me to jump on other transport to get to the office where I worked ... I had to leave at 4 o'clock in the morning and I arrived back in Hamilton at 10 o'clock at night. Which was unsustainable for 6 weeks on a personal basis. They didn't have the ability to say this is going to cost us too much and we can minimise this by putting him into some kind of accommodation close to his office for the short term. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

When flexibility is not shown it leaves a strong, negative impression.

My son was in hospital and I asked for a Panadol and they said you will have to go down to A&E and wait 5 hours or whatever the current waiting time is for a Panadol for me. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Clear communications

It is also important to take into account the need to advise people of timeframes for the delivery of a service they expect.

You need to inform the people, “Okay I have received your application, I have received your issue and I will get to it within the next two weeks”. You actually need to give people a time frame so that okay two weeks is up and they haven’t done anything. Rather than it hangs there. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ One-size does not always fit all

From gaining an understanding of an individual’s circumstances it is expected that public servants should then realise that not everyone should always be treated the same. One-size does not fit all.

You are considered as an individual rather than a case number because everybody’s circumstances are different although we are all part of the same things. It is that you are a human being and you have circumstances that are different. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Priority circumstances

➤ Disability or illness

There was a general assumption in the groups that those who were at a particular disadvantage, such as someone with a disability or who was ill should have their circumstances taken into account more than others.

Isn’t taking into account accepting that someone might have certain limitations or abilities? So you can look at someone and judge their effectiveness, but then you have also got to take into account they have got one arm and one leg. So you have to accept that as part of their limitations. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

➤ Age and household circumstances

One’s age or household pressures were included among those things that also needed to be taken into account depending on context. It may be a lot more difficult for a very old person to travel to an appointment or someone looking after children might only be able to meet an appointment at limited times during the day.

[Other things that are important?] I think that the age or the family circumstances of the person is important whether they be dealing with a superannuitant, an 80 plus year old might not have a license any more to be able to do something to be able to go to a government department. Whereas somebody younger might only be available during certain times in the day because the rest of the time they might have 16 kids around. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

➤ **Public's lack of knowledge**

Another important factor to be taken into account was the public's lack of knowledge about public service processes and rules. This placed an even greater onus on staff to ensure people understood what they needed to know.

It was particularly important to take into account that those on low incomes need their entitlements and need to be informed about them. In this example, a woman had to learn about an entitlement from a third party.

I found out people with disabilities have got an allowance which can pay for things like doctors bills and prescriptions and stuff like that. And a lot of people weren't utilising it and it wasn't until I went along and talked to this person ... they told me about it and then I went back to the ... office and all of a sudden they go yeah, yeah you can get all this stuff. [Why do you think they didn't tell you that?] I don't know, someone has told me it is their policy to purposely not tell you but then I don't know how reliable that information would be. But maybe they didn't know, maybe it is not part of training. But the information should be at least available I would think. (Kaikohe, Māori, female)

And it was also important to take into account that those for whom English is a second language will have difficulty knowing what to do, such as, when needing to access entitlements.

Lack of knowledge of public services can mean that public servants need to take into account that people need re-directing to the right services. This underscores the need for public servants to be aware of the interconnections across services.

Some departments you contact sometimes and it is not the right department and I have rung some people up thinking that is the right department and some of them have not directed me to the correct one. Because some of those government departments in the front of the telephone book you want to ring someone up and you can't find them. It doesn't come under the list. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

5.3.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

The following linkages with other drivers are noted:

■ **The service experience met expectations**

As noted in Chapter 5.1, *The service experience met your expectations* driver links directly to all the other satisfaction drivers. Fundamental aspects of the service experience driver are that people are listened to, their circumstances understood and knowledge and expertise are applied to meet their needs which is precisely what has to happen when someone's individual needs are taken into account. A common expectation to take into account is the need to advise people of timeframes for the delivery of a service they expect.

■ Staff were competent

The *Staff were competent* driver (see Chapter 5.2) showed that competent staff listen and understand a person's needs and have the knowledge and experience to exercise discretion in order to take an individual's circumstances into account.

■ You were treated fairly

This driver has the strongest linkage to taking into account individual circumstances. This is because findings from discussion of the treated fairly drivers (see Chapters 5.4 and 6.4) showed that an important meaning respondents ascribe to treating people fairly is to treat them according to their needs and that not all needs are the same. This is a direct fit with the discussion around taking an individual's circumstances into account as firm views were expressed about those with disabilities or at significant disadvantage needing to have those factors taken into account. Respondents also provided examples of how it had been unfair when flexibility had not been exercised.

■ Trust

One of the most important linkages to trust is to the driver *Public servants treat people fairly* (see Chapter 6.4). As has been explained, this is because taking into account individual circumstances means where appropriate treating people differently, for example, if they have some form of disability or if they are under pressure due to income needs or have difficult household circumstances, or if they have difficulty understanding public service processes. A critical aspect of fairness that respondents describe is to treat people according to their needs and to recognise that not all needs are the same.

Another link to trust is the influence this driver has on perceptions as to whether the Public Service provides services that meet your needs (see Chapter 6.2). While that trust driver is interpreted in one sense as meeting the needs of everyone, it is also understood as meeting an individual's particular needs. In that context, it is essential that individual circumstances are taken into account.

5.3.4 Differences across groups

The following differences are noted briefly as section 7-11 in this report address unique findings to emerge from each of the population groups.

■ Māori groups

➤ Cultural sensitivity

The clearest difference between the groups was the need to take into account someone's culture which was raised in the Māori and Asian groups. In the Māori groups, this manifested itself in a variety of ways.

It was important to Māori to take into account culturally appropriate ways of doing things at meetings, particularly when a significant number of those involved were Māori.

Had a karakia before our meeting and a karakia at the end ... it was great, positive ... because they take into account who you are and recognising. Up here the majority are Māori. Council - you can go in and my mum speaks Māori, I understand it. (Kaikohe, Māori, female)

Some Māori were too ashamed to receive assistance that might be due to them. In the Hamilton group, the example of an elderly woman who was too *whakama* to accept assistance to help her husband into a rest home was given.

My granddad went into a rest home and she was paying something ridiculous, close to \$1000 a week, a lot of money that she was putting in from her own retirement or their retirement to keep him going. The family just went hang on here I am pretty sure there are ways that you can have it paid for by the State. But she took it more as a pride thing and her love for her husband she didn't really want to go down that avenue. But yet it was accessible and other people did it so why not. I don't see any shame in it but she did, she saw it as shame like she didn't love her husband enough. (Hamilton, Māori, female)

Also in the medical arena it was important to take into account that the donation of body parts would raise matters of particular cultural significance.

Taking into account cultural factors does not necessarily mean a person of the same cultural background must provide the service. The most important factor is that the public servant can help. In this example, the respondent is a Māori and she is describing how a Māori child with behavioural problems at her school was assigned a Māori person from Group Special Education to assist him.

Some things are taken into account and it is a waste of time them being taken into account like a child in my class he is Māori, he has behavioural problems at home and at school ... they sent a Māori woman from GSE to come and help him and she doesn't know what she is doing. They have taken into account that he is Māori but it is the stupidest thing they could have done because the best person to help him is this English woman who I have dealt with before ... it doesn't actually matter a damn whether he is Māori or not. But for that what mattered was that the person knows what they are talking about. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Asian groups

➤ Cultural sensitivity

As noted above, the need to take into account one's culture, background and fluency in English were raised by Asian respondents particularly with respect to the difficulties that might be encountered in understanding public service requirements and processes.

Care needs to be taken though as in this example the intent was there, but unfortunately misdirected at this Chinese respondent describes.

It is very rude, I go up to you and say hi how is it going and they start talking in Mandarin or they assume you are Korean which is even worse. Because you can't understand a word of what they are saying. And it is making an assumption that because you come from an ethnic background we have to use a different language. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Rural-Provincial groups

➤ Rural access and keeping appointments

The accessibility of services and the travel distances involved to access services and keep appointments were issues raised by rural-provincial respondents. Often such areas have limited public transport which can make things more difficult. Respondents felt these circumstances needed to be taken into account, particularly when setting up appointment times and ensuring those times were kept.

We used to come into town ... sometimes you have only got a limited amount of time to do something, so you get an appointment and book in for an appointment and you turn up on time, 10 minutes early and then sit there and you wait and wait and wait. And then half an hour has gone past your appointment time and someone needs to talk to you and by that time you have got another appointment. If they took it into account that you were going to have a very busy day for the one day that you came into town then they would be on time. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

5.3.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

Discussion of this driver showed that the most important things for respondents are to be listened to and understood by a public servant who has the knowledge or experience to ensure their individual circumstances can be taken into account. Often this requires public servants to have empathy and to be able to exercise flexibility. These considerations support the following suggestions to improve satisfaction levels.

■ Listen and understand

The first skills a public servant has to possess are to be able to listen and understand an individual's circumstances. This will require staff to be adept at questioning and gaining the trust of individuals so they can share relevant information. Showing empathy and demonstrating a willingness to help resolve matters will assist in this regard, so customer service training needs to ensure front-line staff have respect for each individual they serve. Having respect should mean that exercising compassion and treating everyone as an individual and not 'as a number'.

■ Identify key things to take into account

While there are a wide range of circumstances that may need to be taken into account some circumstances are considered a priority. These include whether an individual has disabilities relevant to their needs and household circumstances that require special attention.

There may also be special difficulties understanding public service processes or how to deal with public services. Staff need to be sensitive to those who may have limited literacy or numeric ability or those from whom English is a second language.

■ Guidelines for exercising flexibility

As there are clear priority areas where there is a high expectation that flexibility is exercised, consideration should be given to develop systems, including guidelines, where it can be exercised to assist people in such circumstances. Front-line staff will need to be trained in how to apply any guidelines.

As noted, individual circumstances are broad in their range. Consequently, it will be difficult to anticipate all circumstances where flexibility could reasonably be exercised. Senior, experienced staff with the authority to authorise discretion to meet individual circumstances should be easily contactable to provide support for front-line staff to manage such situations.

■ Cultural sensitivity

Customer training should ensure front-line staff are attuned to any special needs that may arise from the culture of the individual they are dealing with. As far as possible, public services should inform themselves of the key issues that are likely to arise, so front-line staff can be sensitive to them.

5.4 You were treated fairly

This driver was explored in the general public, Māori and Asian groups as well as with Young People - (younger working 18-23 years) respondents from Hamilton, school students (15-17 years) from Lower Hutt, tertiary students from Dunedin and those with young families from Clutha (Balclutha). In the general public and Māori groups the trust driver *Public servants treat people fairly* was also discussed at the same time and some of those issues are covered in this chapter.

The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public	1		1	1		1			
Māori	1	1		1		1			
Asian			1		1	1			
Young People					1	1	1		1

5.4.1 Overview

There are several different ways in which being treated fairly is interpreted, but whichever way it is interpreted being treated fairly is regarded as a fundamental right.

The first and most common interpretation of fairness focuses on the principle of equitable treatment relative to other people, but this too is interpreted in two different ways. There are those who spontaneously say that to be treated fairly is to be treated the same as everyone else and that the same rules should apply to all. Others, who often give their interpretation after some consideration, talk about treating people the same in the same circumstances, but add that not everyone is the same. This latter view is the one that predominates across the groups and is sometimes expressed as “treat me as you would want to be treated” or treat people according to their individual circumstances recognising that not everyone is the same.

A second most common type of interpretation respondents give to fairness relates to the quality of the service provided. Respondents give as an example of fair treatment services they received that comprehensively met their expectations. Similarly, examples of unfair treatment are where the service has been poor, or people have not been informed of their entitlements or where service quality has been inconsistent. It is conceded that people can be treated fairly even if the service quality may be poor, for instance, due to lack of resources, as long as staff have tried their best within the means available to them. Occasionally, people will feel unfairly treated because their expectation of the service does not match actual delivery rightly or wrongly.

A third interpretation is based on the feeling that a just outcome occurred. This requires that people are listened to and heard and irrespective of the outcome as long as they have had a full explanation for it, they feel that they have been treated fairly.

The fourth type of interpretation is one that stresses the need to be non-judgmental and respectful of others and was more commonly raised in the population groups. For the Asian groups this is most closely associated with racial discrimination. This arises a little in the Māori groups too. For young people at school it is most closely associated with discrimination on the basis of age.

Among Māori, fairness can have a special meaning related to historical treatment and injustices related to the Treaty of Waitangi.

It is generally assumed that public servants are fair and that people are treated fairly. Unfair treatment can often be as a result of an individual's attitude, but equally it is recognised that a poor attitude by members of the public can attract poor treatment. There is therefore an expectation that fairness should result where reasonableness is exercised.

5.4.2 Key themes

Being treated fairly is regarded as fundamentally important even though people interpret fair treatment differently.

I think it is a basic human right to be treated fairly. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Equal treatment

The most common way in which the groups understood being treated fairly was relative to the equitable treatment that others received. The spontaneous interpretation of being treated fairly was that everyone was treated the same. Those who took this view tended to look at fairness in the context of the same law applying for everyone.

Well the same as everyone else really. (Manukau, general public, male)

I like rules and everyone should be treated the same. It shouldn't be up to others to decide. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

■ Flexibility

Even so such examples were countered by others where the exercise of some flexibility or what was regarded as commonsense bearing in mind an individual's circumstances was seen as the fair thing to do.

When they decided to put fences around pools we had a slider that went out onto our pool. I had the council pool man come around who told me that we had to have a pool fence put across the slider with a gate so I could open the slider of my room and then open the gate to get out onto the pool. We had a lot of arguments with this guy. Eventually we had another pool man come around and he said “no, you’ve got no children in your house, you’ve got a lock on the inside of your slider, the rest of your pool is totally fenced, that’s fine”. We got our certificate to say that our pool was safe. I think probably the first person was working to the rigidity of the law. (North Shore, general public, female)

■ Treat according to needs

The prevailing view in the groups was a more considered response that people should be treated the same under the same circumstances. However each individual’s needs and circumstances may be different and this should to be taken into account.

Treating you as a person and actually realising that your situation is different to everyone else’s because everyone is different. (Balclutha, young family, male)

This was sometimes expressed as public servants needing to treat people in the same way they would want to be treated.

Treat people how you want to be treated. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Non-judgmental, respectful and non-discriminatory

The desire to be treated as an individual brought with it the need to be treated without judgement as to a person’s age, income or race. These views emerged most strongly, but not exclusively in the Māori and Asian groups.

Being treated fairly, keeping a standard consistent of age, colour, race, accent. I should look at you as being someone who needs help with a service not as female or as Asian or old, young, poor, rich, that sort of thing. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

One respondent in the Māori group in Kaitaia described himself as looking like an aggressive Māori because of his build and tattoos. Once, when he had taken his daughter into hospital because she had broken her arm playing netball, staff treated him with accusatory looks.

They looked at me. It was just going through that non smacking bill that went through and to me I look like a prime candidate and I felt quite uncomfortable and the people I could just tell by the tone in their voice and it wasn’t until my daughter they said how did it happen and she said I did it at school and then their attitude changed. I don’t know whether I was stereotyped, Māori get a pretty bad thing on TV. (Kaitaia, Māori, male)

Treating people non-judgmentally was often accompanied by the need for people to be treated with respect.

Being treated with respect because if you are needing to use [those services] you are there often not through choice. It is circumstances that have put you there and so it doesn't make you a lesser person which often you are made to feel like a lesser person because often it's a stage in your life and if you are given the help and assistance you will get through it. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Consistency

Service quality and the consistency of service experienced both contribute to perceptions of fair treatment.

Consistency that is the main thing. If you don't have consistency you feel that is not right. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

Consistency can be a particular issue for young people where they may feel that they are being targeted by authorities because of the kind of vehicles they drive or the clothes they wear.

Where there are inconsistencies in the delivery of services, unfairness can be perceived. These can range from major systemic issues through to everyday occurrences.

I work in early childhood and if we see a child who is within the autistic spectrum we try and get as much help pumped into them while they are in early childhood because it is so much easier to access. Once they hit school it disappears and you are fighting tooth and nail to get help for that child whose needs haven't changed, probably increased, but that help that is available is just not there. (Manukau, general public, female)

You say public servants treat people fairly, that there depends on the type of day they are having. (Lower Hutt, Māori, female)

The challenge for the front-line public servant was to avoid bringing their 'bad day' down on the next person they dealt with. Consistent service needs to be provided despite having a bad day personally.

You just kind of pick up the body language of she had a hard night or no thank you. And there are some out there who genuinely would help you and go out of their way to help you but some it's their job, they are there to do a job they are not there to make you happy. They are just there to do their job, get paid and go home. Some days you get it good and some days you don't. (Lower Hutt, Māori, female)

Equally, a poor attitude by members of the public can attract poor treatment. There is therefore an expectation that fairness should result where reasonableness is exercised.

[Any more thoughts on treating people fairly?] It is a two-way street if you want to be treated with respect then you talk to them with respect and they are more likely to treat you back with respect. (Manukau, general public, female)

■ Achieving a fair outcome

Fair treatment can occur even when people do not obtain the result they wanted. This can occur, for example, when an application is made for permission to do something, such as, a building permit. People can feel they were treated fairly as long as they understand the reasons for the decision by having it explained in a reasonable way.

She said “you need 20 metres for your clothesline and 40 metres for recreation and things like that, can’t be done”. Fair enough. She actually went through all the processes and said that basically we’d be too close from the front section, we had to be five metres from the boundary. We had a good old chat and said okay those are the rules and regulations. I didn’t argue with it. Those were the rules and regulations. (North Shore, general public, male)

It is important for people to feel assured that their case has been given due consideration.

I don’t always expect for it to be 100% my way, but I feel that if I have provided everything that you have asked of me then please provide me with some sort or resolve or a level of satisfaction for my efforts. (Kaikohe, Māori, female)

Fair treatment is recognised when staff are seen to be trying to do their best for people despite circumstances, such as, staff shortages or the rules within which they have to work, which may limit their ability to deliver the service expected.

I went into the local hospital for an operation about 10 years ago and the nurses were so good to me but the poor things they were run ragged. It was the system that was wrong but the nurses were so nice. (Kaitaia, general public, male)

To do the best they can within their means. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

■ Fairness assumed

Public servants are generally assumed to treat people fairly.

I think the majority of the time people do get treated fairly you just don’t really remember it. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, female)

5.4.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

The following linkages with other drivers are noted:

■ The service experience met expectations

As noted in earlier chapters, *The service experience met your expectations* driver links directly to all the other satisfaction drivers. The strongest linkage to this driver is that as part of the service experience treating people fairly entails treating people according to their needs and that not all needs are the same. So, exercising discretion or flexibility can be ways of achieving fairness.

In another sense, if people receive poor service well below their expectation they feel that they have been treated unfairly.

However, as public servants were generally assumed to treat people fairly, being treated fairly was not a strongly expressed service expectation.

■ Your individual circumstances were taken into account

There is a strong linkage between this driver and *You were treated fairly* because as has been pointed out fair treatment is seen as treating people according to their needs and that not all needs are the same depending on an individual's circumstances.

■ Trust

The most direct link between *You were treated fairly* and trust is with the driver *Public servants treat people fairly*. There was some ambivalence over whether it was public servants or the 'system' that was the source of unfairness when it occurred.

I think the system is there I think it is the people who can make it seem fair or unfair. Because I think the system is the same for everybody it is the system that is carried out or a face of the system that can sometimes make it seem like fair and unfair. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

Sometimes the poor public servant is just up against it. They may want to be fair but they just can't be. (North Shore, general public, female)

And for some there was no clear difference at all between the satisfaction driver *You were treated fairly* and the trust driver *Public servants treat people fairly*.

What that says to me is the first one is the institute treats you fairly and the second one says the person themselves treats another person fairly. And that is really the culture of the institute again. Does it reinforce that sort of treatment or not? (Manukau, general public, female)

The discussion of *Public servants treat people fairly* in Chapter 6.4 deals with the blurring of these two drivers.

For Māori there are special issues linked to the Treaty of Waitangi that drive to the heart of whether the Public Service is fair and these address some fundamentally different views on trust.

5.4.4 Differences across groups

■ Māori groups

Concerns about racial discrimination emerged in the Māori groups, though it was less pronounced than in the Asian groups.

➤ *Treaty of Waitangi*

The unique difference in the Māori groups was reference to the Treaty of Waitangi in the context of public servants treating people fairly. Prior quantitative research had shown that this driver was particularly important to Māori, so the reasons for this were probed further. In the Kaitaia group the facilitator said that some Māori found this driver particularly important which drew spontaneous laughter from respondents. One was asked to explain what had made her laugh.

I cracked up laughing because you are talking about Māori people being treated fairly and since the Treaty we have felt victimised so that is just a joke really. And considering you are dealing with public services it is all going to keep flowing from that. So I think it needs to get it right at the top and then maybe it will filter into all the other services coming down...I can definitely see where if it was honoured, if the promises were kept there, there wouldn't be this constant pushing for fairness in all these other areas. Because there would already be that sense of equality.
(Kaitaia, Māori, female)

Another respondent in the group also pointed to the relative lack of some social services in the local area for Māori as an indicator of unfairness.

Views on how effectively the Treaty is being honoured over-lap with how fairly Māori feel they have been or are being treated by the Crown and the public servants responsible for delivering the Government's policies. Public servants were seen as representatives of the Government and therefore had a stronger obligation than others to treat people fairly.

They are getting paid to do it. They represent the government, they represent the people who govern our land in authority over us. They above all people should be walking their talk. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

■ Asian groups

The sharpest difference across the groups was the strong focus in the Asian groups on fair treatment being seen as the absence of racial discrimination.

That probably means there shouldn't be any bias, that you can't discriminate or your colour or something like that. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

It was evident that Asian respondents are sensitive to subtle body language signals that may indicate to them that they may be treated differently to others in similar circumstances. This could amount to a simple hesitation on hearing an Asian person's name or a look that suggests that someone is being regarded differently to others.

[Instances where you felt you weren't treated fairly] Not fairly, it's just sometimes when you have face-to-face contact, you see a change in attitude. Or over the phone, when you say your last name which is an Asian name. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Sometimes more overt behaviour by exclusion is experienced.

[Do you feel like you get different treatment because you're Indian?] Yes, it's there. Even in the kindy also where my daughter was, if you're an Indian it's like they don't have the teachers or whoever are monitoring that, they don't show the same interest in bringing them up education-wise or activity-wise the same way that they spend with other children (Manukau, Asian, female)

[Other examples of where you might have been treated fairly or not fairly in accessing public services] People who can't speak good English, they're very impatient with them and they get real frustrated, but if you're going to have customers like that obviously you have to understand. I sometimes have to go with my parents and I always have to help them. I think it's quite rude when they're real impatient. [So they're not treated fairly you think] Yeah. (North Shore, Asian, female)

Across the Asian groups the most frequently cited examples where they felt they had been unfairly treated was when they entered New Zealand at the border. Most felt they were targeted. For example, in the first quote, an Iranian, who has New Zealand citizenship, encounters rigorous checking every time he returns from overseas.

[Any other examples, apart from the visa application, where you feel like you've not been treated fairly?] The airport, every time I go overseas, when I come I get checked... [Are you always checked when you come through?] Yeah, for a couple of hours coming from Middle East, even going to Australia, come back, go there, for hours there, checking. (North Shore, Asian, male)

■ Young people

The younger groups – school students, tertiary and younger working - had relatively unformed views on fair treatment because of what appeared to be a narrow set of experiences with public services.

Young people at school felt more strongly than other groups that being treated fairly is to be treated with respect. For them this effectively means being treated as an adult. Being treated with respect covered discrimination on the basis of age or how one is dressed.

Like I said before at the canteen she is real nice to people in front of you but then she just kind of lashes out at me. What makes me any different, I am still paying like everyone else, I am saying please and thank you. [Why is she rude to you?] Because I have piercings. Discriminating. My mate who wears a bit of foundation she wasn't too polite to her either. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, male)

People stereotype you as typical teenagers. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, female)

There were examples where the absence of full explanations created a sense of injustice and unfairness. This was the case for three respondents in the tertiary students group who had been in Year 11 when NCEA was introduced. They felt they had been unfairly treated as guinea-pigs through their last three years at school and had felt their education had suffered as a result.

5.4.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

Specific areas of training that are important for delivering on this driver are outlined below.

■ Listen, understand and explain

Fair treatment entails taking into account an individual's circumstances. As the previous chapter described to do this effectively front-line public servants need to be able to listen and understand what those circumstances and individual needs are.

If it is not possible to meet someone's needs, then care is required to explain the reasons why this cannot be done. The ability to explain the rationale for decisions in a reasonable manner is an important aspect of demonstrating fairness. Where a need is met, people generally consider they have been fairly treated.

■ Individual circumstances

Issues of fairness are more likely to be present where circumstances are more complex and are less likely to arise over straight forward transactional interactions unless errors or delays are experienced. Systems need to be in place to assist front-line staff if they do encounter more complex circumstances particularly for those on low incomes, in a difficult household situation or with disabilities. And where entitlements are available to people, the onus should be to inform them of their rights.

■ Flexibility

The ability to meet individuals' needs with different circumstances will give rise at times to the need to exercise some flexibility. As stated in Chapter 5.3, public service agencies need to establish guidelines for front-line staff when discretion within specified guidelines can be exercised.

■ Treat with respect and non-judgmental

The perception of unfairness is easily created if individuals feel that they are being treated differently to others in similar circumstances because of their age, income, gender or race. A focus of training for front-line staff needs to be on instilling a positive, professional attitude in dealing with all individuals consistently.

■ Cultural sensitivity

Ethnic minorities are particularly sensitive to feeling they may be discriminated against. Asian groups expressed the need for cultural sensitivity to be applied to them too.