

Responses to Request for Progress Update (received 26 May 2006) from JCPAA hearing on ANAO audit of Centrelink's Customer Feedback Systems

1. QUALITY ASSURANCE:

Q. In response to Question 1.7, Centrelink advises that a mandatory national quality assurance regime for resolution of complaints will be in place by January 2006. Could you please advise if this occurred, or if not, when you expect that it will.

A. Centrelink is addressing the quality assurance issues raised in the ANAO audit report on Centrelink's Complaints Handling System:

1. Centrelink completed a major revision of its Complaints Handling Protocols for its Customer Relations Units (CRUs). These Protocols specify mandatory practices to be followed to ensure consistent resolution of complaints and more comprehensive and accurate recording and reporting of customer feedback contacts, including complaints. In particular, the revised Protocols provide:

- clearer description of what constitutes resolution of complaints
- clarification of required timeframes for complaints resolution
- added emphasis on capturing oral feedback in CSCs and Call Centres
- clarification of data integrity checking and reporting requirements for CRUs
- an overview of the complaints handling process for all network and NSO staff to facilitate their support for CRUs

The revised Protocols were issued to all Customer Relations Units in Centrelink in May 2006. The Protocols will be promoted to all other Centrelink staff to enable them to support CRUs in resolving customer complaints within required standards by the end of June 2006. Revised information has also been added to Centrelink's online E-Reference information suite to inform all staff of the new CRU operating Protocols.

2. Centrelink is developing a post-complaints quality assurance process based upon a quality check of a sample of customer complaint records and follow-up survey of a sample of customers who have lodged recent complaints. The survey will be designed to assess customers' satisfaction with the Centrelink's complaints handling process, and to address any allegations of discrimination or retribution arising from a customer's lodgement of a complaint or other feedback to Centrelink.

At present, the sampling and survey specifications are under development. A tender process to select a provider to conduct the surveys is the next step.

The survey will be run quarterly and is expected to commence in August-September 2006.

3. Revised information has been added to the national Induction Training Program to reflect the content of the revised CRU Protocols and to reinforce the role of all

Centrelink staff in the handling of customer feedback. Further work is proposed to expand training in complaints handling as part of an overall service complaints management strategy being developed to address the broad ANAO recommendations. This work will begin in the latter half of 2006 once project funding has been approved.

2. VALUE CREATION WORKSHOPS

Q. In response to Question 1.11, Centrelink advises that work is under way to upgrade the financial system to collect and record full VCW costs by 31 October 2005. Could you please advise if this occurred or when you expect that it will.

A. Work to upgrade the systems to collect and record full VCW costs is now complete. This will enable monthly reporting on VCW costs.

3. CUSTOMER CHARTER

Q. Appendix 1, Recommendation 1 indicates that Centrelink's Customer Charter was undergoing a major review to be completed in February 2006. Has this been finalised?

A. Centrelink is finalising a major review of the Centrelink Customer Service Charter. The new Service Charter is expected to be launched in June 2006. The new Service Charter will include measurable standards that customers have identified as important to them and will provide a basis for measuring, monitoring and reporting Centrelink's performance against the Charter.

The draft Service Charter and the associated suite of products have been forwarded to the Minister's office through the Department of Human Services for Ministerial approval and sign off.

The Communication Strategy associated with the Charter will enable Centrelink to strengthen its customer focus. The strategy particularly addresses promotion and awareness of the Service Charter amongst DCALB, Indigenous and vulnerable customers.

4. ORIGINAL DECISION MAKER REVIEW

Q. Centrelink advised in response to Questions 1.9 and 1.10 that trials of three alternative models were being undertaken, and were to be completed and evaluated in early 2006. Have these trials been finalised? What was the outcome?

A. The trials were completed in November 2005 and a report on the project was completed in December 2005. This was followed by further consultation within Centrelink, including Authorised Review Officers. The results were submitted to Centrelink's Executive on 19 May 2006, with a view to deciding what changes should be made to the internal review process. A decision is yet to be made on the changes to be put in place.